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Volume Three of
THE PLAYS
OF
J. B. PRIESTLEY

By J. B. PRIESTLEY

FICTION

BRIGHT DAY	FARAWAY
THREE MEN IN NEW SUITS	ANGEL PAVEMENT
DAYLIGHT ON SATURDAY	THE GOOD COMPANIONS
BLACK-OUT IN GRETLEY	WONDER HERO
LET THE PEOPLE SING	BENIGHTED
THE DOOMSDAY MEN	ADAM IN MOONSHINE
THEY WALK IN THE CITY	JENNY VILLIERS

PLAYS

DUET IN FLOODLIGHT	THE ROUNDABOUT
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MISCELLANEOUS

DELIGHT	APES AND ANGELS
POTSCRIPTS	SELF-SELECTED ESSAYS
RAIN UPON GODSHILL	THE BALCONINNY
MIDNIGHT ON THE DESERT	THE ENGLISH COMIC CHARACTER
ENGLISH JOURNEY	MEREDITH (E.M.L.)
FOUR-IN-HAND	PEACOCK (E.M.L.)
I FOR ONE	THE ENGLISH NOVEL
TALKING: AN ESSAY	HUMOUR (E. HERITAGE SERIES)
OPEN HOUSE	BRIEF DIVERSIONS

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

VOLUME I

<i>Dangerous Corner</i>	<i>Johnson Over Jordan</i>
<i>Eden End</i>	<i>Music at Night</i>
<i>Time and the Conways</i>	<i>The Linden Tree</i>
<i>I Have Been Here Before</i>	

VOLUME II

<i>Laburnum Grove</i>	<i>The Golden Fleece</i>
<i>Bees on the Boat Deck</i>	<i>How Are They at Home</i>
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VOLUME III

<i>Cornelius</i>	<i>An Inspector Calls</i>
<i>People at Sea</i>	<i>Home is Tomorrow</i>
<i>They Came to a City</i>	<i>Summer Day's Dream</i>
<i>Desert Highway</i>	

THE PLAYS
OF
J. B. PRIESTLEY

VOLUME III



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INTRODUCTION

It may be difficult to prevent a note of regret, an air of melancholy, from creeping into this Introduction. The reason is that I believe the kind of Theatre for which these plays were written is already losing its hold, which was never at any time large and strong, on the London playgoing public. The kind of Theatre I mean might be called the author-director-team Theatre. I have put the author first because in this Theatre he comes first; and the skill and energy of the director and his players are entirely devoted to the task of putting on to the stage what the author has created on paper. In short, the play's the thing. And in this Theatre a bad play cannot hope to succeed because so much depends upon the playwright. If his work is poor, then the director and the players, who are there to express him, are doomed. If his work is great, and the whole organisation of director and players is on an unusually high level, then what is produced is wonderful and unforgettable, as it is in the Moscow Art Theatre productions of Chehov. It is my view—though this may be a writer's prejudice—that whenever the Theatre has made history in our time, whether in Moscow, Dublin, Paris, London, New York, something like this kind of Theatre has been established. And at the same time a theatrical tradition has been successfully defied and broken.

This tradition, which still held the London Theatre at the beginning of this century and to which, in my view, we are now returning, assumes that the playhouse exists so that we may enjoy some tremendous piece of acting, as if the stage were the show-case for one or two magnificent, flashing personalities. To anybody steeped in this tradition, a great evening in the Theatre is not provided by a fine play exquisitely directed and performed but by some staggering performance by a favourite player. What such a playgoer demands from the Theatre is the sort of excitement that fashionable subscribers to opera discover in the performance of a famous prima donna. And here I venture to remark that it is a misfortune that so much depends in our playhouses on what happens to a new play on its first night, when the impact of a solid play, beautifully presented, may seem to be unimportant when compared with the blaze of excitement created by one huge glittering performance. On such occasions we often find critics raving over productions (which they turn into immediate successes) that look fairly tawdry to a cooler playgoer some weeks later. But it may be argued—as I think so good a critic as the late

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James Agate would have argued—that such first-night excitement is the essence of theatrical value, just as the playhouse exists to show us these colossal displays of acting, these enormously heightened and richly coloured personalities. To which, I admit, there is no adequate reply. Playgoing is not a duty but a pleasure, and if a man declares that he visits the theatre simply in search of grand large-scale performances by his favourite players, so that he can experience a certain kind of excitement that is essentially theatrical, then I cannot say he is wrong. (And he has tradition on his side.) All I can suggest is that the Theatre is capable of offering more satisfying and rewarding pleasures, feeding the memory and haunting the imagination; that when it has broken with this tradition it has for short periods admittedly enlarged itself and increased its value to the community; and that if we return to this tradition, condemning the author-director-team Theatre, we cannot avoid, in my opinion, certain unfortunate consequences.

If the Theatre is to be dominated again by star players and actor-managers, then not only will no high level of team acting be attained or even attempted—and that means that most modern masterpieces cannot be adequately performed—but also there will soon be very few plays of real value offered to the public. I shall be told that this does not follow. It will be argued that if our commanding star players or actor-managers are men and women of taste and intelligence, they will choose work of taste and intelligence to perform. To which I shall retort that this also does not follow. Not that I believe for a moment that our players in command have not taste and intelligence. Most of them have both to an exceptionally high degree. Their concern for the Theatre is as great as yours or mine, perhaps much greater. (After all, their life's work is there, whereas yours and mine may not be.) But it is my conviction—and our theatrical history bears me out—that the actor-manager cannot help but see the playhouse in terms of his own performance and personality. He is quite right to do so, because the whole enterprise depends upon him. A play in which he shares the honours with half-a-dozen other actors may be all very fine, but it is not what he wants and not what his public want. Then again, being human (and perhaps rather spoilt) he cannot resist looking about for a large fat part that suits his mood of the moment. Perhaps he has a fancy for playing an emperor or a ragged prophet. Anybody got any emperors or ragged prophets? And if not, couldn't clever old So-and-so knock off something? . . . Ring up and ask him to supper. So the author, with whose creation the other Theatre began, is now one of the hangers-on of this Theatre, a provider of situations and words out of which the great man will make something. (Gerald du Maurier, whose skill both as actor and director was superb, often deliberately chose plays of inferior quality just to show what he could do with them.)

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And of course the situations and words will be forthcoming; but, except in the rare and lucky instances where the solid author and the actor-manager happen to be enthusiastic about the same idea, they will soon be situations and words conceived by a hack. Why are most film scripts so bad? Because nine out of ten of them, at least, are not based on the writers' own ideas but are stories shaped and coloured to the taste of the producers and their stars. Reduce the status of the author, and down goes the level of his work, and with it the whole level of drama, including sooner or later even the acting of the actor-manager, who needs the challenge and stimulus of parts not tailored to fit him. It is true that this kind of Theatre can keep going for a time on the classics—though most of these are best performed by companies with the team spirit—but a Theatre that has to deny itself the most vital contemporary dramatic writing will soon be only half-alive.

I am not proposing here that the Theatre should be dominated by its authors. No matter how much experience we authors have had, we still need the theatrical discipline and practical skill of directors and leading players. Bemused by our ideas, and far away from audiences, we are apt to make bad mistakes. Our demands on both players and playgoers may be unreasonable. But on the other hand the purely theatrical folk, who are further away from ordinary life than we are, also stand badly in need of our ideas, to bring new life into the Theatre. The business of the director (who stands between the author and the actors, between life and the Theatre, and who is therefore a very important figure) and his players is to make these ideas, this new life, theatrically effective. Let all work together, as they do in the kind of Theatre in which I believe, and good drama can be created. But if the playhouse is to be dominated entirely by the actor, then the temptation to achieve at any cost an easy theatrical effectiveness becomes irresistible. Why not keep to the well-tried old devices? Why take a risk with this queer new-fangled stuff? Our public don't want it. And we pull them in, not the authors—which is true enough. But pull them in to what? Where does this line of least resistance take us? Never towards the Theatre that lights up its whole community, that makes a playgoer happily proud to have been one of its patrons, that makes a contribution to our whole world civilisation. I am not pretending that the plays in this volume belong to such a Theatre. Quite apart from the question of their own merit, the organisation was never there. Nevertheless, perhaps because these plays were conceived and produced in what was a better atmosphere than we have now, were not written to please X. or pack them in for Y., some of them have been played a great many times in many different parts of the world, and have cast a far longer shadow than they would have done if they had been faked-up to catch a passing mood in the West End of

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London. Strange though it may seem to many of our critics and more fashionable playgoers, the Theatre does not begin in Shaftesbury Avenue and end at the Strand. It exists wherever there is some sort of playhouse, and men and women ready and eager to act, and other men and women hoping to be entertained and moved, to wonder and to admire.

CORNELIUS: This play about life in a City office (and the reader may take it from me I know nothing about City offices) was first produced at the Duchess Theatre in 1935, with Ralph Richardson in the leading part, and revived at the Westminster in 1940, with Stephen Murray in the same part. Originally it had one of the most enthusiastic first nights, together with one of the best Presses, I have ever had, thanks to a very fine cast and a magnificent production by Basil Dean. I remember that some of my fellow playwrights were particularly warm in their appreciation of this piece, and yet audiences, interested but rather bewildered, never quite took to it. And I suspect that the audiences were right. There are, I think, excellent scenes, speeches, touches of character-drawing, in this play, but as a dramatic whole there is something wrong with it, as the audiences, who often have a profound intuition, discovered. Probably the trouble is that it is not all in one key, one tone, and that while the ingredients are all right, the pudding is not properly mixed and cooked. Yet I must put on record what I overheard on the last night at the Duchess. A young middle-aged business man, another "Cornelius", was speaking, and I overheard him say: "Why didn't anybody tell me about this play? It's wonderful. It's so—so true." And I remember E. V. Lucas, who liked the play, writing to me about it and saying that I ought to write a sequel to it, showing "Cornelius" finding himself in some distant romantic place. The idea was attractive, but I have always distrusted sequels. *Cornelius* has never attracted much attention abroad, but has been frequently produced by the larger repertory companies here. If it should ever be revived again, it would have to be done as a period piece, because it does not belong to our post-War world.

PEOPLE AT SEA: After some hesitation I have included this play (there were three competitors for this place), chiefly because several theatrical friends of mine profess to like it very much. It was produced at the Apollo Theatre in the late summer of 1937, when I already had two successful plays running in London, and perhaps this fact influenced the critics, for they were very severe with this piece, and it had a short run. Whether the production, by Auriol Lee, deserved a better fate I cannot tell, because I never saw it either in rehearsal or during the run. I had to go to America before the play was even cast, and it

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had vanished before I returned in the Spring of 1938. But the cast, which included Jean Muir, Vivienne Bennett, Carla Lehmann, Marjorie Fielding, Edward Chapman, Torin Thatcher, Martin Walker, Carl Jaffe, among others, was an exceptionally good one, and so if the play failed then the fault was probably mine. The setting and action are ingeniously contrived, I think, but the characters are rather a shop-soiled lot.

THEY CAME TO A CITY: Thousands of performances of this play have been given, but nobody has seen it who did not see the original production, directed very adroitly by Irene Henschel, and played superbly by Google Withers, Renée Gadd, Ada Reeve, Frances Rowe, Mabel Terry-Lewis, John Clements, Raymond Huntley, A. E. Matthews, Norman Shelley—one of the best casts I have ever had. It opened in 1943 and after a very successful tour it had a long run at the Globe Theatre. Since then it has been produced in many theatres abroad, and has been a great favourite with repertory and amateur companies here at home. It has also been filmed, with the original cast. I have read and heard many wildly different accounts of what this play is about, and I have been told, among other things, that it is really a study of the Integration of the Personality (see Jung), a drama of life after death, a slab of Left Wing propaganda, a plea for town-planning. My best reply perhaps is to describe how I came to write it. During the War I was impressed by the very different attitudes of mind that people had to any post-War changes, which were then being widely discussed. It seemed to me there was a play in this, so long as I could keep away from the mere play of debate, which I dislike, and discover an appropriate “symbolic action”. (I use the quotation marks because this is my own term and not generally known. Actually this play offers a good though perhaps rather crude example of the “symbolic action” on which so many of my plays and novels are built.) The unknown city gave me exactly what I wanted but it should be remembered that what is important in the play is not the city but the respective attitudes of the characters toward it. If there are still some prospective directors of this play among my readers here, I should like to warn them against turning it into a melodramatic production with much too heavy a bias against the older characters, a mistake that I think we contrived to avoid in the original production. It is not one of my own favourites, but I consider that much of the First Act is ingeniously contrived.

DESERT HIGHWAY: This play, though it was given a limited run at the Playhouse, was never intended to be a contribution to the Theatre. It was specially written, as a gift to the Army, to be produced

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by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, among whose staff was that fine director, Michael MacOwan. The idea was that it should be performed by soldier-actors chiefly for audiences of troops in camp, although the production made a certain number of appearances in ordinary theatres, where all profits and royalties were given to a book fund for the Services. Just after the War, a young manager, against my advice, took a production of it round the country, and, to my astonishment, made a great success of his venture. It opened originally at the old Theatre Royal, Bristol, and made its first appearance in London, before an imposing audience of ministers and generals, in February 1944, with Stephen Murray and John Wyse playing the two leading parts. When the War was over, it was produced in various European countries. To some intelligent critics, my device of jumping back twenty centuries in the Second Act, to give a feeling of historical continuity, gave the play its special quality and appeal; but to other critics, no less intelligent, this act was nothing but a rather tedious interlude. As my own soldiering belongs to the First World War and I saw little of the Army during the Second, I had to do a good deal of wild guessing in order to create my six Second War soldiers; but I was never told that my characters were out-of-date.

AN INSPECTOR CALLS: Sometime during the winter of 1944-45 I wrote this play at top speed, finishing it within a week. (Plays of this kind, in which one situation inevitably leads to another, and in which a certain uniformity of manner and tone is essential, are in my view best written very quickly.) Then it had a curious history. To begin with, as no London theatre was available for it, I sent a copy of it to Moscow, where it was translated at once and produced there, during the summer of 1945, simultaneously by two famous companies, afterwards finding its way to many different cities in the Soviet Union. Again, it is the only play of mine that I have actually seen performed in seven or eight capital cities, including London, New York, Paris and Moscow. Finally, the city that liked it least was the one in which it was written, London, where it appeared at the opening of the Old Vic season in October 1946. Basil Dean's production was excellent, and it offered an interesting and, I think, successful experiment with the set, which was swung round and enlarged so that in each act you obtained a different view of the same room. The cast, which included Margaret Leighton, Marian Spencer, Ralph Richardson, Alec Guinness, Julien Mitchell, could hardly be bettered. I received many enthusiastic letters about it from people not easy to please in the Theatre. Yet it was most sourly noticed, and though I believe that it was always warmly received by audiences, it barely maintained a most modest place in the Old Vic's repertoire that season. Possibly, as it has been

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suggested to me by various knowledgeable persons, the play was in the wrong place, among all the costume and glamour of the Old Vic productions; and perhaps I would have been much wiser to have kept it for a run in a rather smaller playhouse. I can only add that it seems to have succeeded almost everywhere else; and in Germany, for example, at least 1,600 performances of it were given within about eighteen months. And I have had the privilege of observing a most remarkable collection of Inspectors.

HOME IS TOMORROW: After three heart-warming weeks in the provinces, where everybody seemed to know what we were trying to do, we opened this play at the Cambridge Theatre (most unsuitable but all we could get) in the late, too late, autumn of 1948. The cast, headed by Leslie Banks, Irene Worth, Alan Wheatley, Cecil Truncer, seemed to me perhaps the most exciting cast to watch that I have ever had. And Michael MacOwan's production seemed to me strong, truthful, sensitive. We were all very excited about this play, which my associates and I considered to be one of my best. (But admittedly it was not an easy play to write, direct, act or see.) And even now we stare at each other, bewildered, when one of us mentions it. For—let us face it—it was a thumping flop. Not only was the play itself disliked but hardly anybody appeared to like the production and the acting. Most of the notices seemed to us completely idiotic, as if the critics had gone to the wrong theatre. Clearly something was wrong somewhere, but to this day I cannot tell who or what. Nevertheless, it is possible for the reader here to make a few small tests for himself. For example, one influential critic called it a discussion on a desert island; another said it was not a play at all but a bunch of essays; and yet another announced that I was trying to write a thriller in the John Buchan manner. The text is here, and I leave the reader to judge for himself what truth there is in these typical critical pronouncements.

SUMMER DAY'S DREAM: I took a great deal of time and trouble over this play, which was re-written several times. As its title suggests, it is really a fantastic comedy, in which, however, certain values come up for discussion; and it is not, as some weekly reviewers appeared to think, a political-economic manifesto. With an interesting cast, grandly led by Herbert Lomas as "Stephen Dawlish", the play had four good weeks out of London, opened in the early autumn at the St. Martin's Theatre, and was withdrawn just before it reached its fiftieth West End performance. But it had not been a failure in the sense that *Home Is Tomorrow* was a failure. It had been enthusiastically praised by most sections of the Press; and our audiences were very warm and demonstrative in their appreciation of it. It played to figures that

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would have ensured it a long run before the War. But we were in a small but expensive theatre; our running costs, which included heavy charges for handling two elaborate sets, were much too high; and although we could have kept going on "smash hit" business, anything less than this meant a piling up of losses we could not afford. The whole economic background to this play seemed to me so monstrous that I did not even want to make a fight of it, as I might have done earlier. Let me make the issue plain. The costs of production and the running costs of a play in the West End are at least twice that they were before the War. On the other hand, the prices of admission are only about ten per cent more than they used to be, and even these prices are now thought to be too high, especially by the hard-pressed middle-class public that probably forms the bulk of my special audience. This means that theatrical conditions in London are now like those in New York, where there have long been a few successes surrounded by masses of lamentable failures. It makes theatrical production a wild gamble: either you "hit the jackpot" or lose all. And it is my contention that serious dramatic work cannot exist very long in such an atmosphere. It is fatal to that author-director-team Theatre which I described earlier. Either companies working on these lines (as I suggested in my *Theatre Outlook*) must be subsidised, at least for a few years, or the serious and experimental drama will no longer find any home in London—and, because London is still our theatrical shop-window, may even vanish altogether in this country. Nor is this my own private problem. Some of the plays in this and the two earlier volumes have been successfully produced in playhouses all over the world; they have helped at no charge to do the work for which the British Council is paid millions every year; they have brought foreign currency to this country at a time when it was badly needed, and perhaps they have created a friendly interest in us. And no man can long sustain the rôle of an established British playwright if he finds it impossible to have his new work adequately produced in Britain. Moreover, at a time when the people of this country need all that a Theatre with integrity and vitality can give them, there is a serious danger that this Theatre may disappear from our battle-worn scene. Certainly the situation may change—and change with dramatic swiftness, because that is how things happen in the Theatre—but at this time of writing the outlook is anything but bright.

J. B. PRIESTLEY

Brook,
December 1949

CORNELIUS

A Business Affair in Three Transactions

TO
RALPH RICHARDSON
with admiration and affection

CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

MRS. ROBERTS
LAWRENCE
MISS PORRIN
BIDDLE
CORNELIUS
RUG MAN
ERIC SHEFFORD
PAPER TOWEL MAN
COLEMAN
YOUNG WOMAN with Soap, etc.
EX-OFFICER
JUDY EVISON
DR. SCHWEIG
FLETCHER
ELDERLY MAN, prophet
MRS. READE
TWO WALKING-ON CREDITORS
PRITCHET
MORTIMER
ROBERT MURRISON

The action takes place in the general office of Briggs & Murrison, Birdcage Street, Holborn. The First Act on Monday morning, the Second on Wednesday afternoon, and the Third on Friday evening two weeks later.

Cornelius—Copyright, 1935, by J. B. Priestley

*Produced at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham, on March 17th, 1935,
and at the Duchess Theatre, London, on March 20th, 1935, with the
following cast:*

MRS. ROBERTS	MURIEL GEORGE
LAWRENCE	TOM GILL
MISS PORRIN	ANN WILTON
BIDDLE	JAMES HARCOURT
CORNELIUS	RALPH RICHARDSON
RUG MAN	ALBERT WARD
ERIC SHEFFORD	WILLIAM RODWELL
PAPER TOWEL MAN	PAUL SMYTHE
COLEMAN	FELIX IRWIN
YOUNG WOMAN	HAZEL CARNEGIE
EX-OFFICER	RAYMOND HUNTLEY
JUDY EVISON	VICTORIA HOPPER
DR. SCHWEIG	FELIX IRWIN
FLETCHER	RAYMOND HUNTLEY
ELDERLY MAN	ALBERT WARD
MRS. READE	DOROTHY HAMILTON
PRITCHET	VICTOR TANDY
MORTIMER	ROBERT GILBERT
ROBERT MURRISON	HARCOURT WILLIAMS

Play produced by BASIL DEAN

ACT I

Office of Messrs. Briggs & Murrison, Aluminium Importers, Birdcage Street, Holborn, Monday morning. An ordinary general office room of the more old-fashioned kind, with a recess at the back lit by opaque window in the wall. Window to street on left, main door on left at right angles to window. On right wall door to Private Office. A long high desk in recess at back, and a desk at each side further down, one of them with a typewriter and a telephone. Small table with typewriter (covered at first) and typist's chair in front of window on left. Copying-in corner by recess on right. Ledgers, files, etc., prominent on walls.

When curtain rises, the office is empty. There is a pale wintry sunshine coming through window on left. Then Private Office door opens, and MRS. ROBERTS backs out, followed by gusts of smoke. She coughs and angrily mutters: "Oh, blast the thing!" then goes back into the room. She is a stoutish Cockney woman in her fifties, with a red face, a hoarse voice, and a ripe character. LAWRENCE enters, a rather weedy youth of 19, wearing a raincoat that is not very adequate for this cold weather. He comes forward carrying a number of unopened letters—the morning's mail—which he puts down on the nearest table while he blows on his hands. Then he puts his hat and coat away in the cupboard meant for that purpose (probably down stage right) and then sees MRS. ROBERTS coming out of the Private Office again, followed by smoke.

LAWRENCE: Hello, you're late.

MRS. ROBERTS: Yes, and you'd be late if you'd that devil of a thing in there to deal with. (*Coughs.*)

LAWRENCE (*idiotically*): It's smoking again.

MRS. ROBERTS (*with immense irony*): Do you know, I believe it is. (*With gusto.*) Smoking! You can't see across that little bit of a room for smoke. If I've told 'em once, I've told 'em fifty times. There's something wrong with that chimney. The place's full of soot. I give it up.

LAWRENCE from now on is getting on with his first duties. He puts the letters on various desks. He fills all the inkwells from a large bottle of ink, puts clean sheets of blotting-paper on the various desks, takes the covers off the two typewriters, and so forth.

LAWRENCE: Well, it doesn't matter.

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MRS. ROBERTS: It doesn't matter to me if it doesn't matter to them.

LAWRENCE: Mr. Murrison's still away, and Mr. Cornelius won't mind. He nearly always stays out here, anyhow.

MRS. ROBERTS: Good luck to him!

LAWRENCE: Only we'd better get his table out.

MRS. ROBERTS: Come on then. I want to finish up.

They go into the Private Office and return carrying a small working table. The top is covered with newspapers. They put this near the door into the Private Office, and then, while MRS. ROBERTS is taking off the newspapers and beginning to dust a little, LAWRENCE returns to bring out a chair, which he puts behind the table. During the dialogue that follows, while LAWRENCE gets on with his ink and blotting-paper business, MRS. ROBERTS does a little more perfunctory dusting.

LAWRENCE (*grumbling*): Look at me. Still doing this!

MRS. ROBERTS: Well, what about it?

LAWRENCE: This is an office boy's job.

MRS. ROBERTS: What of it? Aren't you the office boy?

LAWRENCE: Yes.

MRS. ROBERTS: Well then?

LAWRENCE: I'm nineteen.

MRS. ROBERTS: Never! (*Then stares at him speculatively.*) No, I dare say you are.

LAWRENCE: There's no *dare* say about it. I know I am. I'm nineteen. I've been here nearly five years, and I'm still the office boy.

MRS. ROBERTS: Fancy!

LAWRENCE: They won't get a kid to do this. They won't promote me. And I'm nineteen. It's absolutely rotten.

MRS. ROBERTS: Why don't you leave then?

LAWRENCE: I would if I could get another job. I keep trying.

MRS. ROBERTS: That's right. You keep on trying. And if at first you don't succeed—suck eggs. (*Gives a sudden roar of laughter.*)

LAWRENCE (*properly ignoring this*): I've written for hundreds of jobs. I'm taking a correspondence course in wireless now.

MRS. ROBERTS: Now that's a good job—wireless. I've a nephew—my sister's oldest—who's in that. Has a shop of his own in Hackney. Wireless and gramophones.

LAWRENCE: I'm making a gramophone. I've nearly finished it.

MRS. ROBERTS: Well, I call that clever. I wouldn't know how to start.

LAWRENCE: I've made lots of wireless sets.

MRS. ROBERTS: You're just like my nephew—the one at Hackney. Of course he's older. But I expect you'll be taking the girls to the pictures now—eh? Or don't you bother with 'em?

LAWRENCE (*gloomily*): Not much.

MRS. ROBERTS: Alfred—my nephew—was just the same. He'd rather be doing his wireless and what not. But then one fine day—before you could say Jack Robinson—lo and behold—he goes and gets married, and to as flighty a little piece as ever I saw. One o' these fancy blondes that's always having their hair waved. Goes right from Hackney to Kensington High Street—Pontings and Derry and Toms—to do her shopping. At least, that's what *she* says. I wouldn't trust her a yard. I'd like to have a look at her Derry and Toms. And I think that'll do.

She stops dusting and takes her apron off. MISS PORRIN enters. A little woman in her early thirties, spectacled, rather dried up, very simple in manner.

MISS PORRIN: Oh—good morning, Mrs. Roberts.

MRS. ROBERTS: Morning, miss. Quite strangers, aren't we? How are you getting on among it all?

MISS PORRIN: Quite well, thank you. And how are you?

MRS. ROBERTS: Fair—just fair. I'm not getting any thinner and you're not getting any fatter—that's right, isn't it?

MISS PORRIN (*taking off her hat and coat*): It looks like it, doesn't it? Good morning, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE: Good morning.

MRS. ROBERTS: Here—how's Mr. Cornelius these days?

MISS PORRIN: All right, I think.

MRS. ROBERTS: He hasn't got married again, has he?

MISS PORRIN: Oh—dear no.

MRS. ROBERTS: Well he ought to, a big fine man like him. He must have been a widower now—oh—for seven or eight years. I call it too long. You ought to set about him yourself, Miss Porrin.

MISS PORRIN (*brightly*): Such a strange thing happened to me—just now—in the bus. I was carrying my German book—I'm studying German, you know, Mrs. Roberts—I'd been reading it in the bus, but then I'd stopped because it made my eyes ache—and the bus gave a jerk and I dropped my German book, and a gentleman sitting opposite picked it up and handed it to me. And do you know—wasn't it strange?—he was a German himself. He told me so when he saw what the book was. Wasn't it strange?

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

MRS. ROBERTS (*with a wink at LAWRENCE*): When are you meeting him?

MISS PORRIN: Oh no, certainly not. I'm not meeting him anywhere. It wasn't like that at all. He just picked up the book and——

LAWRENCE (*brutally*): And gave it back to you and told you he was a German. We know.

MISS PORRIN: Don't be rude, please, Lawrence. (*Smiling at MRS. ROBERTS.*) But that's all that happened.

MRS. ROBERTS: Good job too, if you ask me. Don't you start taking up with foreigners, Miss Porrin. You don't know where they'll land you.

LAWRENCE (*in melodramatic tone*): White Slave Traffic!

MRS. ROBERTS (*preparing to go*): Well, a girl I used to know married one o' them Germans—a writer he was—and she got White Slave Traffic all right, a basin-full, for he kept her at it, washing and scrubbing and cooking, from morning till night. Well, I'll be off. And tell 'em they can't blame me for the soot and mess, not till they got that chimney in there properly done. I can't work miracles. If I could, I wouldn't be here. Ta ta.

She goes out, carefully taking with her a large lump of coal wrapped in newspaper. MISS PORRIN goes over to her desk and takes some papers out of a drawer, looks at her typewriter, etc. LAWRENCE is slowly finishing his little jobs. Telephone rings.

LAWRENCE (*at telephone*): Hello! This is Briggs and Murrison. No, we're not. Well, I ought to know, oughtn't I? We're Briggs—(*deliberately*) and Murrison. (*Puts down receiver.*) And that's silly, when you come to think of it.

MISS PORRIN: What is? Wrong number?

LAWRENCE: No. But every day except Sunday for years at that telephone, I've been saying Briggs and Murrison, Briggs and Murrison, and for years and years you've been writing down Briggs and Murrison, Briggs and Murrison, and all the time there hasn't been a Briggs in the firm at all, only Mr. Murrison——

MISS PORRIN: And Mr. Cornelius. He's a partner.

LAWRENCE: Yes, but I call it a waste of time and breath going on year after year, saying Briggs, writing down Briggs, when there isn't a Briggs. And nearly everybody else doing the same thing.

MISS PORRIN: It doesn't matter.

LAWRENCE: It does. I call it silly and clumsy. You couldn't make a gramophone or a wireless set like that.

MISS PORRIN: That's because they're new things, Lawrence. All

new things are neat, like that, but old things aren't. And a lot of business is really old.

LAWRENCE: Yes, but why? Why shouldn't all this be neat and new and sensible? Why should it be so old-fashioned? I'll bet it needn't be. I'll bet—

But MR. BIDDLE has entered. He is a clerkly elderly man, obviously very neat and methodical. He is well wrapped up and carries a folded newspaper—the "Morning Post". He takes off his overcoat, hat, and muffler during the following speeches.

BIDDLE: Good morning, Miss Porrin. Good morning, Lawrence.

MISS PORRIN: }
LAWRENCE: } Good morning.

BIDDLE: It's still raw, very raw. Very little sign of spring about. (*Sniffs.*) Hello, has that chimney been smoking again?

LAWRENCE: Yes, Mr. Biddle. Ma Roberts says it's completely blocked up.

BIDDLE: We must have it attended to before Mr. Murrison comes back. Mr. Cornelius doesn't mind being out here, but Mr. Murrison wouldn't like it. Where's Miss Evison?

MISS PORRIN: She hasn't come yet.

BIDDLE: I shall really have to talk very seriously to Miss Evison. She's late nearly every morning now, and even when she is here, her mind's not on her work.

MISS PORRIN: I don't think she's very well, Mr. Biddle.

BIDDLE: Possibly not, possibly not. But that's no real excuse. Mr. Murrison—in my opinion—isn't very well, hasn't been well for some time, but there he is—in the Midlands—up north—travelling all the time, visiting all our customers, not sparing himself.

LAWRENCE: I think that's quite different.

BIDDLE (*banteringly*): Oh—you think that's quite different, do you, Lawrence? And why might it be different?

LAWRENCE: This is Mr. Murrison's own show. It's his firm.

BIDDLE: And it's my firm. And it's your firm.

LAWRENCE (*not too rudely*): No it isn't. This is simply the place where I come and put out blotting-paper and copy letters for twenty-five bob a week.

BIDDLE: Yes and you don't always do that very well. Get me the Day Book and the In Ledger.

LAWRENCE *goes to get the books. The telephone rings and is answered by MISS PORRIN.*

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

If that's Howlett and Company, I'll speak to them. Is it? Right. (*Takes telephone.*) Yes? Biddle here. Oh—is it Mr. Howlett? Yes, Biddle. . . . Yes, Mr. Howlett, I quite understand. We're all in the same boat nowadays, aren't we? . . . (*Laughs.*) That's very good. I must remember that. Now, listen, Mr. Howlett. Our Mr. Murrison's away. . . . Yes, he's gone himself. . . . Back on Wednesday. No, Mr. Cornelius isn't here yet. . . . Now, now, Mr. Howlett . . . you know us. . . . Oh no, Mr. Howlett. . . . Hello, hello!

It is obvious that MR. HOWLETT has rung off prematurely, possibly in a temper. As BIDDLE puts down the receiver, he looks very worried. His speech that follows, which he gives as he begins looking through the letters, is more for his own benefit than for his listeners'.

I've been in business for over forty-seven years, and I can tell you that a day of it now is worse than a month of it in the old days. Upon my word, it's misery trying to do business nowadays. Everybody and everything make it as difficult as possible.

MISS PORRIN (*turning round and holding out letter*): I know, Mr. Biddle, I'm so sorry. What about this Excelsior Transport Company's claim? You asked me to remind you.

BIDDLE (*taking letter*): I should think so. Disgraceful, I call it. Ask that young fellow—what's his name?—Shefford—to come round at once. Mr. Cornelius had better take it up with him. He'll deal with that lot. He'll give them something to be going on with.

Takes this letter, along with some others, over to CORNELIUS's table, then returns to his own desk to open some more letters. MISS PORRIN begins ringing up, but is not heard. CORNELIUS enters, immediately dominating the scene. He is a well-set-up fellow between forty-five and fifty, outwardly an office man, though not too sedentary in appearance, but with a certain eager, humorous, imaginative way with him that suggests that the youth in him is by no means dead. He wears a heavy overcoat, with several newspapers stuck in the pockets, and a soft felt hat which he removes as he enters. He can be smoking a pipe. He arrives with great gusto.

CORNELIUS: Good morning. Good morning.

BIDDLE:

MISS PORRIN : } Good morning, Mr. Cornelius.

LAWRENCE: }

CORNELIUS (*immediately going over to the letters on his table*): Anything from Mr. Murrison?

BIDDLE: I'm afraid not, Mr. Cornelius.

CORNELIUS (*muttering*): Damned nuisance!

BIDDLE: I'm afraid there's no order come through from Chale's either.

CORNELIUS (*gloomily*): I'm not surprised. As soon as I saw young Chale's face, I knew there wasn't an order in it. There was *No* all over it. All permanently screwed down and hermetically sealed. Marvel to me how he ever gives himself any food and drink. Why is my table out here again?

LAWRENCE: It's smoky in there again, Mr. Cornelius.

BIDDLE: We shall have to complain to the landlord about that chimney.

CORNELIUS: That's not so easy. We owe him some money, (*As he takes off his overcoat.*) Miss Evison.

BIDDLE: She's not here yet.

CORNELIUS (*gives his hat and coat to LAWRENCE*): Then she ought to be.

BIDDLE: She's getting very slack, I'm afraid—very slack.

CORNELIUS (*sitting at his table*): Not ill, by any chance, is she?

MISS PORRIN: I think she is, Mr. Cornelius.

As CORNELIUS begins to look through letters and papers on his table, BIDDLE comes across and stands attentively behind the table.

CORNELIUS (*as he goes through letters, etc.*): Hm. Solicitor's letter. Cattermole, MacIvor and Pritchett—all very grand, eh?—authorised by something-or-other *Française*—to represent French clients—settlement of claims immediately on best possible terms—that's a nasty one, Biddle.

BIDDLE: It's no use, sir. We shall have to meet them.

CORNELIUS: Looks like it. Small cheque from Shaw and Johnson? Not much, but better than nothing. (*Hands it over.*) Pay it in this morning, and make it look a lot. That'll keep the bank amused until lunch time.

BIDDLE (*doubtfully*): Shall I take it round myself?

CORNELIUS: Better not. They'll never let you go until we've agreed to see them all on Wednesday. Send Lawrence round with it.

BIDDLE takes the cheque to his desk, endorses it, etc., all very carefully.

What's this? Excelsior Transport Company? Here, I want to talk to these scoundrels. What have you done, Miss Porrin?

MISS PORRIN: I've rung them up and asked the young man who came here first—you remember him, Mr. Cornelius?

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

CORNELIUS: Yes, of course I do. Soapy young twister! What's the name?

MISS PORRIN: Shefford—Eric Shefford. I've asked him to come round at once and see you.

CORNELIUS: Quite right. (*Goes through more letters.*)

BIDDLE (*giving envelope*): Take this round to the bank, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE *takes hat and goes.*

CORNELIUS: Another grim letter from Czecho-Slovakia—Hecht and Drapok. Why don't they use a typewriter? And why the devil isn't Miss Evison here? And if she can't come, why doesn't she let us know. (*Puzzling over letter.*) Something about their Dr. Schweig. Oh, what a letter! These people ought to be in the secret service. (*Puzzles over it.*)

There enters breezily a fellow with a red face and a hoarse voice and a confidential but loud manner. He is carrying two rugs over his arm.

RUG MAN: Now I'm a sailor, gentlemen, just landed yesterday at Tilbury Dock, and while I was away I picked up a few things that I think would interest you gentlemen——

CORNELIUS (*looking up*): Go away. You're not a sailor. And we don't want any rugs this morning.

RUG MAN: That's right, sir, it's a few rugs I'm selling. Now just cast your eyes over this one——

CORNELIUS (*ferociously*): If that flea-bitten rug isn't out of here in two seconds, I'll throw it out of the window.

RUG MAN (*folding up rug, pugnaciously*): All right, all right.

CORNELIUS (*getting up, dangerously quiet in manner*): It isn't all right.

As he steps round the table, the RUG MAN suddenly bolts.

CORNELIUS *laughs and sits down again. The telephone bell rings.*

MISS PORRIN *answers it.*

MISS PORRIN: It's the bank. The manager would like you or Mr. Biddle to call and see him, this morning.

CORNELIUS and BIDDLE *look at one another, rather ominously.*

CORNELIUS: You'd better go, Biddle. I couldn't get Murrison back before Wednesday afternoon—if they insist upon a meeting as early as possible. And say there's no point in our creditors meeting before Murrison does come back, simply because we're hoping his trip will have saved the situation.

BIDDLE *nods and begins getting his coat on.*

Tell them Mr. Biddle's coming round at once. (*Returns to examining*

letters and papers.) Good God!—what's this? North London Crematorium?

BIDDLE: Oh—I'm sorry, Mr. Cornelius. Those two letters are mine.

CORNELIUS: Is there another one? Oh—yes. Valley of Rest Crematorium. Here you are. (*Handing them over.*) But why?

BIDDLE (*as he takes letters, carefully folds them, etc.*): I made up my mind some time ago that I'd like to be cremated, and so I've been getting estimates. There's a difference of about thirty-seven shillings between the two.

CORNELIUS: But perhaps the more expensive people make a better job of it?

BIDDLE (*seriously*): No, I don't think so. Both of them follow the same routine, I believe.

CORNELIUS: Don't tell me what it is. Tell them at the bank.

BIDDLE *goes to the door, goes out, but immediately returns.*

BIDDLE: The young man from the Excelsior Transport Company's here—Shefford.

CORNELIUS (*grimly*): Tell him to walk straight in.

BIDDLE *withdraws and SHEFFORD enters. He is a rather weedy, vaguely handsome young man, smartly dressed. He is not feeling very comfortable.*

SHEFFORD: Oh—good morning. Excelsior Transport Company. You wanted to see me, I think.

CORNELIUS (*taking up paper and moving towards him*): I did. I do. We've got a claim here from your Company for eight shillings a ton more than we agreed to pay you.

SHEFFORD: No, that's a mistake, I'm afraid.

CORNELIUS: Oh—you mean your people aren't going to claim the extra eight shillings a ton?

SHEFFORD: No, that's the usual rate. I mean, you must have misunderstood my quotation. What I gave you was the actual freight, without clearing and cartage charges, and—er—as you must have seen—it's on all our memo forms—there's an extra twelve and a half per cent for clearing and cartage charges—which works out at an extra eight shillings a ton. It's—er—all perfectly straightforward.

CORNELIUS: It's about as straightforward as a corkscrew. You knew very well when we accepted your quotation that we knew nothing about that extra eight shillings a ton, that we were in a hurry to get the metal delivered, and that you were getting the business under false pretences.

SHEFFORD: No, I didn't. How should I know—

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

CORNELIUS: Because you made a great point of the fact that your quotation was lower than anybody else's, whereas with this extra twelve and a half per cent, it isn't. And if you want to know what I think you are, I'll tell you. You're a young twister. You wanted the business and you didn't care a damn how you got it. Look—(*tears up the paper and tosses the pieces into SHEFFORD's hat*) that's what we think about you and the Excelsior Transport Company. Now go back and tell them so.

SHEFFORD: All right. I will.

CORNELIUS *turns his back on SHEFFORD, who picks the pieces out of his hat and stuffs them in his pocket, shrugs his shoulders and goes out.*

CORNELIUS: Lot of young men like that about, Miss Porrin. Twisters. If you have it out with some of them, they tell you it's not their fault, it's the system. God knows I don't admire the system. If there is one, it's getting me down. But they'd still be twisting under any system. They couldn't go straight on a desert island.

MISS PORRIN: I'm afraid that's true. I'm so sorry, Mr. Cornelius.

CORNELIUS (*with rough good-humour*): Well, nobody's blaming it on you, Miss Porrin.

A little man has just sidled in, holding a large bag.

Hello, how did you get in?

LITTLE MAN (*with insinuating voice*): Good morning, sir, I won't keep you one minute. Now you people have to wash here. You have to provide yourself with towels. Those towels have to be sent to the laundry. They have to be renewed.

CORNELIUS (*back at his table now*): Nothing this morning, thank you.

LITTLE MAN: Sometimes people use the wrong towels. It's all very dangerous and very expensive. Now I have here a selection of paper towels—as used by some of the biggest firms in the City. They're perfectly efficient, hygienic, and inexpensive——

CORNELIUS (*firmly*): Not this morning.

LITTLE MAN: Just take a look at some of these——

CORNELIUS: Will you go away?

LITTLE MAN (*with a certain pathetic dignity*): I'm sorry. Good morning.

He goes out, as quietly as he came, drooping a little under the weight of his bag.

CORNELIUS (*irritably*): Where's Lawrence? Why isn't he here to keep those fellows out? Either they're blustering and then they make

you angry, or they're pathetic—like that poor little devil—and then they make you feel miserable. And all the time there are a thousand things to be thinking about. And what on earth's become of Miss Evison? Is she on the telephone at home?

MISS PORRIN: No, I don't think so, Mr. Cornelius. And I do agree with you about those men who come round with things. There seem to be more and more of them.

CORNELIUS: There are. We'll all be doing it soon. All calling on one another with rugs and paper towels and shaving-soap.

LAWRENCE *enters*.

Lawrence, go and shut the outer door. Then open that Enquiries window of yours, ask 'em what they want, and don't let 'em in unless they've got some proper business here.

LAWRENCE *proceeds with this. Meanwhile, telephone¹ rings.*

MISS PORRIN *answers it*.

If you don't want to have to get rid of a corpse about lunch time, Lawrence, then don't let any more of these fellows in.

MISS PORRIN: It's Brandings, of Birmingham. They want to speak to you or Mr. Murrison.

CORNELIUS (*happily*): That's more like it. (*Goes to telephone. At telephone*) Hello! Brandings? Cornelius speaking. . . . Oh yes—is that Mr. Flockton? Thought I recognised your voice. . . . Yes, of course. Much as you like. That's what we're here for, as the parson said to. . . . Yes, exactly same quality as before. Our people over there are very dependable. . . . How much? My dear fellow, you're joking. We couldn't buy it at anything like that figure, not with the pound only worth twelve and sixpence over there. . . . No, but we can't help it either. Now be reasonable, Mr. Flockton. We can quote you—hello, hello. (*He lets the receiver droop.*)

MISS PORRIN: Shall I get them again?

CORNELIUS (*bitterly*): No, he meant to go. They don't even wait to say good-bye now. They just ring off. They've no use for you. You're out. It must be taking Murrison all his time to collect a few more orders. I don't know how he's doing it—if he is doing it. (*Goes slowly back to his table.*)

LAWRENCE (*through little window*): What name, please? Have you an appointment? (*To CORNELIUS.*) Mr. Coleman. He says it's important.

CORNELIUS (*getting up*): Yes, yes, of course. I want to see him.

LAWRENCE *admits* COLEMAN, *a middle-aged business man with a sharp jerky manner.*

Morning, Mr. Coleman.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

COLEMAN: Morning, Mr. Cornelius.

CORNELIUS: How's copper wire these days?

COLEMAN (*grimly*): You know. (*Produces piece of paper, confidentially.*) Heard anything from Canada lately?

CORNELIUS: Not for a fortnight. Have you?

COLEMAN: Yes. And I was passing, so thought I'd slip in and tell you.

CORNELIUS: Very good of you, my dear chap.

COLEMAN: We had a night letter cable from our man Blake in Ottawa. Just came this morning. Here. (*They look at it.*) You see? Embargo's certain now on everything but low-grade sheet metal.

CORNELIUS: Yes. (*Grimly.*) I like that last bit. All the best and he's just going fishing. What do we reply to that? All the worst and we're just going to cut our throats, eh?

COLEMAN: Make a difference to you people too, won't it?

CORNELIUS: Yes. We haven't been buying much from Canada lately, or it would make a lot of difference. As it is, it takes the last crumb of cheese and leaves us in the mouse trap.

COLEMAN: It's a great life, isn't it?

CORNELIUS (*solemnly*): "And we are glad to report that business conditions everywhere are improving". Loud cheers from everybody *present*, all living on gilt-edged securities.

COLEMAN (*with slight laugh*): Well, thought you'd like to have the news.

CORNELIUS: Much obliged to you, Mr. Coleman.

They shake hands. BIDDLE enters, looking rather miserable.

COLEMAN (*going*): Not at all. Morning. (*Goes.*)

CORNELIUS: We're cut off from Canada now, Biddle. Shan't be able to buy a pound of decent metal there. I notice you don't look very cheerful.

BIDDLE (*with small forced smile*): Don't I, sir? I'm sorry. I'm afraid I wasn't feeling very cheerful. (*Begins taking things off.*)

CORNELIUS: What happened?

BIDDLE: Well, as you know, Mr. Cornelius, I've been going round to the Middlesex and Central Bank a good long time now. I knew most of the old lot very well. I used to like going round there, sir. I regarded it as one of the pleasantest parts of my duty. We used to have a good deal of quiet fun——

CORNELIUS (*pleasantly sardonic*): It must have been very quiet.

BIDDLE: Well, you know, Mr. Cornelius—we'd chaff one another, have our little jokes.

ACT I

CORNELIUS

CORNELIUS: And there aren't any more little jokes, eh?

BIDDLE: Well, it's a bit of a shock to go in as I did this morning -- the manager was quite pleasant, but——

CORNELIUS (*lowering voice*): What happened?

BIDDLE (*coming nearer, confidentially*): They're pressing very hard. They say it's head office.

CORNELIUS: You told them about Murrison making a big drive for orders?

BIDDLE: I made a great deal of it, said you staked everything on it.

CORNELIUS: I do. I know Bob Murrison. *He can do it.*

BIDDLE: I had to promise we'd make a definite statement to them and the other creditors here on Wednesday afternoon.

CORNELIUS: I thought you'd have to. Well, I'll wire Mr. Murrison at once. And you'd better let all these people know—these solicitors—Cattermole, MacIvor and the rest of it. And the Central Forwarding Company. And—Miss Porrin—you'd better wire Hecht and Drapok^s—I don't know where their Dr. Schweig is—telling 'em we're having a meeting of creditors—an *informal* meeting of creditors—here on Wednesday afternoon, about three.

MISS PORRIN: Yes, Mr. Cornelius. Hecht and Drapok.

CORNELIUS: Those are your men, Biddle. (*Hands him some letters.*) And cheer up. A lot of things can happen on Wednesday.

CORNELIUS begins writing furiously. BIDDLE looks thoughtfully at the letters in his hand, then walks slowly up to his desk with them.

MISS PORRIN is listening at the telephone. She puts it down in disgust.

MISS PORRIN: Can I send Lawrence down to the Post Office with this telegram to Hecht and Drapok? I can't get through to foreign telegrams on the telephone.

CORNELIUS (*still writing quickly*): Yes, and he can take this one to Mr. Murrison with him too.

Finishes letter, puts it in envelope, hastily addresses envelope.

LAWRENCE takes completed letter from him, then goes to MISS PORRIN, who gives him telegraph form and some money from small cash box. LAWRENCE hurries out. CORNELIUS relaxes and lights his pipe.

By the way, there's the landlord. He ought to be told about Wednesday. That old boy's treated us very decently, hasn't he?

BIDDLE: Very decently indeed, sir. We can't complain at all in that direction.

MISS PORRIN: May I say something, Mr. Cornelius?

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

CORNELIUS: Why not?

MISS PORRIN (*with timid resolution*): Well, I think—when you take everything into consideration—that a lot of people are very good. (*Gives quick nervous laugh and returns to work.*)

CORNELIUS: Perhaps. But you've got to take a devil of a lot into consideration though. It seems to me sometimes—

He stops and stares because a young woman, cheaply but fairly smartly dressed, and with a very assured manner, has just entered the office. She is carrying a small case.

YOUNG WOMAN (*brightly*): Good morning.

CORNELIUS (*rising*): Good morning.

YOUNG WOMAN: I'm sure you gentlemen are needing some shaving-soap, tooth paste, talcum powder, brilliantine—

CORNELIUS: I'm not. Are you, Biddle?

BIDDLE (*looking round hastily*): Oh—no, certainly not.

YOUNG WOMAN (*opening case and descending upon CORNELIUS with terrific smile*): Now I'm sure I can tempt you.

CORNELIUS: I'm sure you can too. ♪

YOUNG WOMAN: Well, then? All good new lines. Cheaper than the shops. What about some shaving-soap then?

MISS PORRIN (*suddenly and surprisingly coming forward*): Please—go away. Go away at once. Nobody wants anything here. And you know very well they don't.

YOUNG WOMAN (*surprised*): Here, wait a minute. I wasn't talking to you.

MISS PORRIN (*indignantly*): I know. But I don't care. It's disgraceful—taking advantage—just because you're a woman. You're much worse than the men.

Telephone rings.

CORNELIUS (*rather dryly*): Telephone, Miss Porrin.

MISS PORRIN *with a final glare at the intruder, turns to answer the telephone. The YOUNG WOMAN turns her batteries on CORNELIUS again.*

(*Mumbling.*) All right. I'll have a tube of shaving-cream. That'll do. How much?

YOUNG WOMAN: Two shillings, please. .

CORNELIUS (*producing money*): Cheaper than the shops, eh? I wonder what shops. Here you are. (*Takes shaving-cream and hands over money.*)

ACT I

CORNELIUS

YOUNG WOMAN: Nothing else? Thank you, good morning. (To MISS PORRIN.) Good morning.

Goes out.

MISS PORRIN (*rather severely*): It's Mr. Howlett, wishing to speak to you, Mr. Cornelius.

CORNELIUS: Tell him I'm out, Biddle, but that I'm writing to him.

BIDDLE *goes to telephone and repeats this message while MISS PORRIN is talking as below. MISS PORRIN comes forward with a letter.*

MISS PORRIN: What about this account, Mr. Cornelius? (*Hands it to him.*)

CORNELIUS (*looking at it*): Eighty-seven pounds! I didn't know it was as much as that.

MISS PORRIN: It's been owing several months, and there was the typewriter and the table and chair, as well as the usual things.

CORNELIUS: Well, we can't pay it, that's all. Are they pressing us hard?

MISS PORRIN: I'm afraid they are.

CORNELIUS: I could talk to them—but it doesn't look very good when——

MISS PORRIN: If you like, I think I could go and talk to them. They know *me* because I've always ordered the things there. I could tell them you're both away and that one of you has to pass the account before we can settle it.

CORNELIUS: Yes, all right. Try that. Go round now. (*Hands her the account back.*) I say, you were very severe with that young woman who came in just now, weren't you?

MISS PORRIN (*hesitates then gathers courage*): Well—Mr. Cornelius—you don't mind my saying this, do you? But I do think it's such a shame—you're so firm with all those poor men who come round worrying us, and then, just because this is a girl and she comes in so impudently—oh, they're so much worse than the men. I'm sorry for most of the men, but these women—they're horrible. (*Goes for her hat and coat.*)

CORNELIUS (*ruefully*): I dare say you're right.

MISS PORRIN: I—I know I am. They're just vulgar—vulgar—shameless——

CORNELIUS (*humorously*): Steady. Steady now.

MISS PORRIN (*rather triumphantly*): Sirens!

And she makes quite a triumphant exit.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

CORNELIUS: And that's that, Biddle.

BIDDLE (*thoughtfully*): I've noticed before, sir—and you must have done too—the female sex hasn't a lot of sympathy for itself.

CORNELIUS: I have noticed it. And how the quiet little shy ones hate the big bouncing ones.

Takes a small account book and begins making little calculations on paper from it. He looks thoughtfully across at BIDDLE, who is now dealing with a ledger.

Biddle, suppose we can't *carry on*. What's going to happen to you?

BIDDLE (*slowly*): Well, it might be worse, sir. It might be a lot worse, sir. I've a married daughter living in South Devon. They've a little business, and they'd like us to join them. We've got something saved up. We've been careful—

CORNELIUS (*dryly*): You must have been.

BIDDLE: Yes, we've been very careful, and so we've got something saved up. And that would come in useful down in South Devon. And it's very *nice* down there—very *nice* indeed.

CORNELIUS: That's *good*. But don't you ever feel—doesn't it ever come over you quite suddenly—that you've been wasting your time?

BIDDLE (*seriously*): But I don't waste my time, Mr. Cornelius.

CORNELIUS: I don't mean that. I mean, that you've wasted your *life*, just as if you'd taken it and poured it down a drain.

BIDDLE: No, I never think that for a minute. I've led an honest and useful life, Mr. Cornelius, and I'm not ashamed of it and I don't regret any of it.

CORNELIUS: Well that's something to be thankful for. It would be horrible, at your age, if you felt anything else. It's bad enough at my age. You're a lucky man, Biddle.

BIDDLE: Yes, Mr. Cornelius, in some ways I am. I've always been able to work, and I've always enjoyed my work. The fact is, Mr. Cornelius, there's always been something very attractive to me about *figures*, numbers. In a sort of way, they're alive. For instance, seven has got quite a different character from eight. And five is one sort of person and six is quite a different sort of person. Like all of us.

CORNELIUS (*amused*): So all the time, while you were pretending to work, you've been having the most astonishing adventures in that corner?

BIDDLE: In a way—Yes, I have.

CORNELIUS: I tell you—you're a lucky man, Biddle. *You've* never felt you were worrying the hair off your head, the sight out of your eyes, for what was nothing better than a piece of damned futility. I

have—sometimes. Only sometimes. If I hadn't been working here with Bob Murrison—

Stares at nothing for a moment, then turns back to his accounts. A man in his early thirties enters, carrying a sample case. He still holds himself well, but he looks pale, thin, nervous. He wears a short moustache and has the rather clipped speech of the ex-officer.

EX-OFFICER (*not very confidently*): Good-morning, gentlemen. I'd like to show you some samples of the stationery and other office supplies my firm is offering.

CORNELIUS (*shortly*): No thanks. 'Morning.

EX-OFFICER: Any kind of stationery, carbons, typewriter ribbons—

CORNELIUS (*decisively*): No.

EX-OFFICER (*sticking it*): I'm sure you will find we can quote you office supplies at a very cheap rate. And they're all—er—of first-class quality. My firm—

CORNELIUS: We don't want anything, and I don't want to hear about your firm.

EX-OFFICER (*desperately*): Can't I possibly interest you, sir, in our office stationery, carbons, ribbons—

CORNELIUS (*jumping up and flinging open cupboard on right*): You're just being a nuisance, wasting our time as well as your own. There's a cupboard full of stationery, carbons—(*in his impatience he takes the young man by the shoulder and swings him towards the cupboard*) ribbons, paper-fasteners, rubbers and God knows what. More than we can use up this year. Stacks of it, stacks of it. Look here, what's the matter?

For the YOUNG MAN is in danger of collapsing.

Steady man. (*Supporting him*) What's the matter? Here, sit down, sit down.

The YOUNG MAN does, closing his eyes, for a moment, then, with an effort, opening them, with CORNELIUS standing almost over him and BIDDLE, rising, also watching him.

EX-OFFICER (*with an effort*): Sorry. Suddenly felt giddy. Did a stupid thing—this morning. Only had a cup of coffee before coming out. Not enough perhaps on a cold morning.

CORNELIUS (*staring hard at his face*): No, not enough. And you hadn't enough yesterday or the day before either. In fact, you're half-starved, aren't you? That's why you nearly collapsed.

EX-OFFICER (*rather confusedly*): Have been a bit on short rations lately. But—anyhow—feeling rather—cheap.

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CORNELIUS (*irritably*): You can't come in here starving like that, trying to sell us things we don't want. What are we to do?

EX-OFFICER: All right. I'm going.

CORNELIUS: No you're not, not for a minute or two. But why do you do it? Why don't you get something else to do?

EX-OFFICER (*grimly*): What?

CORNELIUS: Well, what were you originally?

EX-OFFICER: Air Force.

CORNELIUS: Officer?

EX-OFFICER: Yes. Had a bad break-down. "North-West Frontier. Then I was broke.

CORNELIUS: But surely you could have done something better than trying to sell that stuff? I know jobs are hard to get. But why stick to England at all? Why didn't you go to one of the colonies or to South America?

EX-OFFICER: No money. I tried. They don't want you any more in those places unless you've got capital. They don't want you anywhere. My God—you don't think I didn't try everything before doing this?

CORNELIUS (*incredulous, not contradicting*): I can't believe the world's all shut up like that—with a *Keep Out* sign everywhere.

EX-OFFICER: That's what it looked like to me. You haven't—a cigarette, by any chance?

CORNELIUS *gives him one*.

Thanks. (*Lights it*.) I take it—you wouldn't like any stationery or ribbons or anything? Sorry to be offensive, but a chap's got to live. Or at least I suppose so. No carbons? No account books?

CORNELIUS: Look here, if I spent another penny on that stuff, when we're jammed up with it, I'd be acting dishonestly towards my partner. But I can't see you go out in that condition. You won't be able to carry that case of yours soon. Take this (*holds out note*) and for God's sake treat yourself to a good square meal before you do anything else.

EX-OFFICER: Nice of you—but——

CORNELIUS: Oh—take it—(*forces it on him*) we want to get on with our work. it

EX-OFFICER (*rising*): Sorry. No use telling you I'll pay you back some time, I suppose. I will, though, if I can sell any of this stuff. And I might be able to once I've got some hot food and a drink inside me.

CORNELIUS: I doubt it. For the love of Mike, try to sell something else.

EX-OFFICER: Yes, but what?

CORNELIUS: Well, anything but that. We get scores of fellows with that stuff. Be original. Strike out for yourself. Come round with fresh lobsters or pipe cleaners or dirty postcards. Think of some new way of earning a living. There must be dozens that nobody's ever tried.

EX-OFFICER: No doubt. But don't you see, if I was capable of inventing a new kind of job, I should never have been in this fix at all. I'm not clever enough. Don't pretend to be. What gets me down is that I'm not allowed to earn my living in any of the old ways. And thanks again for this (*indicating note*). I'll pay you back some day. So long. (*Moves to door.*)

CORNELIUS: Good luck! (*Watches him go, then turns to BIDDLE.*) D'you think that's true, Biddle—that here's a fellow, willing to work, fairly intelligent, who not only can't get anything to do here—I can understand that—but who finds the whole world closed to him, bolted and barred?

BIDDLE: I'm afraid it might be.

CORNELIUS (*with some agitation*): I can't believe it. If you're willing to work hard, willing to take risks, ready to be scorched or frozen, drowned or sent half-mad with thirst, there must be openings for you somewhere in the world. They can't have closed everything up, so that we're all like bees in a glass case. It's unthinkable, Biddle. I've always had at the back of my mind a little open door, with plantations and jungles and pampas and quartz mountains just outside it—with the sun on 'em. Don't tell me that all the time that little door's not been open, has been locked from the outside, screwed fast.

BIDDLE: The Coventry people are worrying about that consignment of circles we sent off last week.

CORNELIUS (*back at his table now*): They've no need to grumble. We're out of pocket now on that deal, thanks to the nice kind French people: sharks with beards and attaché cases.

Telephone rings. BIDDLE answers it.

BIDDLE (*at telephone*): Briggs and Murrison. . . . Who? . . . Oh . . . I'll see. Just a minute. (*To CORNELIUS.*) It's the Income Tax people—the inspector—wants to speak to you.

CORNELIUS: Oh. New idea, telephoning, isn't it? But I believe I ought to have seen that chap this morning.

BIDDLE: What shall I say?

CORNELIUS: I'll talk to him. (*Goes to telephone.*) Hello. . . . Yes, this is Cornelius. . . . Oh, yes. Sorry I didn't turn up. . . . Yes, I dare say it is important, but so is this business—to us, and you seem to

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have an interest in it too. What was it? . . . Well I'm here at the end of the telephone. What's the matter with that? You don't want to *look* at me, do you, my dear chap. . . . A legacy? Yes, I had. A small one. . . . What did I *do* with it? I spent it. . . . Yes, I spent it. . . . What *on*? My dear sir, you take a most flatteringly deep interest in my affairs, don't you? . . . Well, the government then. . . . All right, tell the government I spent it recklessly and luxuriously and with the most devilish abandon. . . . Yes, beautiful mad women. Processions with elephants and brass bands through oriental cities. A private guard of swordsmen and detectives with machine-guns. Great glittering white yachts. Fountains of wine. Yes, and tell the government I've no further interest in the country. I've dissolved the partnership. They can keep what they've already had out of me, but they won't get any more. I'm on my own now. . . . All right then, my dear sir. Send me the pink or buff form and I'll deal with it. Good morning. (*Puts down telephone and returns to table.*)

BIDDLE (*chuckling*): I wonder what he's thinking.

CORNELIUS: He's thinking I'm off my head, and he's probably right. This famous legacy he's worrying about—wanting to know what I did with it, mind you—came to me from an old aunt of mine at Waltham Cross, and amounted to exactly eight-seven pounds and ten shillings. What did I do with it? Tut-t-t-t. (*Tries to work, but sound of voices outside.*) Now what's this?

LAWRENCE *enters*.

What is it?

LAWRENCE: It's Miss Evison.

CORNELIUS: Well, if it's Miss Evison, why doesn't she come in? We've been waiting for her half the morning. What's the matter?

LAWRENCE: It's not our Miss Evison, sir. It's her sister.

CORNELIUS: Oh. Well, bring her in then. She must have a message for us.

LAWRENCE *holds the door open and JUDY EVISON enters. She is a girl about twenty, small, pretty, with an engaging childlike quality that makes her markedly different from anybody else who has appeared on the scene. She is oddly composed in manner. She is cheaply but quite charmingly dressed.*

JUDY (*entering, then stopping*): Good morning.

CORNELIUS (*getting up*): Good morning.

JUDY: Are you Mr. Cornelius?

CORNELIUS: Yes.

JUDY (*not impudently*): You're rather different from what I expected.

CORNELIUS (*good-humouredly*): Well, I don't know that I care much about that. What's happened to your sister?

JUDY: I came to tell you. Her husband's been suddenly taken ill in Newcastle.

CORNELIUS: Her husband! I never knew she had a husband. Did you know that Miss Evison had a husband, Biddle?

BIDDLE: Not the least idea of it, sir.

JUDY: Well, she has. She was married about six months ago.

CORNELIUS: But why didn't she tell us? I call it very unfriendly of her, getting married and never saying a word about it. Not only unfriendly, but also underhand, deceitful.

JUDY (*smiling*): Not really. I can explain.

CORNELIUS: All right then, explain. But see you make a good job of it, because we're resentful—aren't we, Biddle?

JUDY *begins laughing*.

What are you giggling about? There's nothing to giggle about.

JUDY (*still laughing a little*): I'm sorry. But—I think you're funny. My sister—used to talk about you, and I always thought you sounded funny.

CORNELIUS (*humorously exasperated*): But my dear young woman, you can't come here—calmly announcing that your sister's married, then giggling, then telling me to my face that I'm funny.

LAWRENCE *suddenly explodes with laughter*.

That'll do, Lawrence. Outside.

LAWRENCE (*recovering*): But where to, sir?

CORNELIUS: Anywhere. Haven't you something for him to do, Biddle?

BIDDLE: Take this round to the Central Forwarding people, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE *takes letter from BIDDLE, picks up his hat, then looks at JUDY and CORNELIUS as he gets to door, goes out and is heard exploding again*.

JUDY (*calmly*): I'm sorry. I didn't realise that boy was silly.

CORNELIUS: You seem to me a very extraordinary young woman. Now tell us about your sister.

JUDY: They hadn't much money when they married. Her husband's a traveller—for a firm of chemists—but he's only just begun. And Ann thought that if she told you she was married, she might lose her job here, and they couldn't afford that, and it didn't matter about her working because Alec was away so much. And now he's ill—

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pneumonia—in Newcastle, and she's rushed up there to be with him. And I think she ought to go, don't you?

CORNELIUS: Yes. But I wish she'd told us she had a husband who at any moment might suddenly get pneumonia in Newcastle.

BIDDLE: It's very inconvenient indeed.

JUDY: Yes, I know. But you see—that's why *I'm* here.

CORNELIUS: Oh?

JUDY: I'm a shorthand-typist too, and I can do her work quite easily.

CORNELIUS: But why haven't you got a job of your own?

JUDY: I left mine last week.

CORNELIUS: Why? I thought nobody left their jobs nowadays.

JUDY: I do. You see I was working for a Spaniard—he was a fat yellow sort of man with a black beard—and he'd come to England because he had a theory about pigs——

CORNELIUS: Pigs?

JUDY: Yes, pigs. And he used to be out all day and I had to stay in a very dirty little room in Victoria with nothing to do, and then he'd come in about five o'clock and begin dictating long, long letters—in the queerest English—all about pigs, and then I had to stay there hours and type them. I hated it. He was a very smelly sort of man too.

CORNELIUS: Perhaps it was the pigs.

JUDY (*seriously*): No, I think it was something he ate. Anyhow, I loathed it. So I left.

CORNELIUS: And now you'd like to come here.

JUDY: Yes, I wouldn't mind it here. And I'm quite a good shorthand-typist. Better than Ann, as a matter of fact.

CORNELIUS: I dare say, but, you see, we're used to her and it might take us a long time to get used to you.

JUDY: But she may be away for weeks.

CORNELIUS: That's true. But we could easily get somebody. You seem such a formidable young woman.

JUDY (*demurely*): I'm not. I'm very quiet.

She smiles at him and finally he grins back.

CORNELIUS: All right. That's your place over there. (*Indicates table by window.*) You'd better start now—er—Miss Evison.

JUDY: My name's Judy.

Takes her hat and coat off calmly.

CORNELIUS: You already know my name. And this is Mr. Biddle, the cashier.

MISS PORRIN *enters*.

Oh—and this is Miss Porrin, who'll show you what to do, if necessary.

To MISS PORRIN, who is regarding JUDY with surprise and some disfavour.

Miss Porrin, this is Miss Judy Evison, who's come to take her sister's place. (*Turns away.*)

MISS PORRIN: You're—very young, aren't you?

JUDY (*brightly*): Yes, aren't I? But I've had a very good training.

Sits down at her table and examines her machine, etc. There is a sharp rap on the door. MISS PORRIN goes to it and brings back a telegram which she gives to CORNELIUS, who rises and moves forward to read it. He is plainly puzzled by it.

CORNELIUS: I say, Biddle. (*As BIDDLE comes forward*) I've a wire here from Mr. Murrison. Read it. (*As BIDDLE reads it*) I think it must be one of his jokes.

BIDDLE: Funny time this for joking, sir.

CORNELIUS: Yes, but you know what he is. Besides, it's the only explanation. Why should I know anything about two men following him? It's some old joke of his that he's reviving and that I've forgotten. You see what that means, Biddle?

BIDDLE: No.

CORNELIUS: It means he's in good spirits. Probably got a bagful of new orders that he's keeping as a surprise for us.

BIDDLE (*dubiously*): Well, I hope so, Mr. Cornelius. (*Handing back telegram.*)

CORNELIUS (*indicating telegram*): And this is just like him. Now then, Miss Evison the Second, just bring a notebook and pencil over here, please. (*He sits down, and JUDY crosses with notebook, taking up a position just behind him, standing. Handing her a letter*) Those people. Dear Sirs, In reply to your letter of the 11th instant, we regret to inform you that no further supplies of the French metal your number A73—are—er—available at anything like the price you mention, owing to present foreign exchanges. We—er—should like to draw your attention—however—to our Canadian sheet metal—too fast?

JUDY: Much.

CORNELIUS: Which-will-not-be-available—er—long-at-present-prices—owing—

A voice is heard outside saying, "Briggs and Murrison? 'Morning", in the brisk manner of postmen, and now LAWRENCE enters

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with two letters and a parcel. He hands one letter to BIDDLE and the other letter and parcel to CORNELIUS.

(To JUDY.) Just a minute.

Opens letter, which he tosses aside, then he opens parcel, which contains a large octavo modern book. At this moment the telephone rings. MISS PORRIN answers it and after a moment can be heard saying "Mr. Cornelius? Yes, I'll ask him." There is now a sharp rapping at the Enquiries Window, which LAWRENCE opens. He can now be heard saying to the invisible caller "Mr. Cornelius? What name, please?" Meanwhile, CORNELIUS, after looking at the title and title-page of his book, is now glancing at the first page.

(To JUDY.) I ordered this book from a second-hand catalogue. Don't often do that. It's about the Andes.

MISS PORRIN: Mr. Cornelius, you're wanted on the telephone.

LAWRENCE: Mr. Cornelius, there's somebody called Frensham wants to see you.

JUDY: Mr. Cornelius, what about this letter? *(These three speeches can overlap.)*

CORNELIUS *(still staring at book)*: I like the look of this. Listen. "After a week in the Indian village, we decided to take the track into the clouds, to find among those heights *the lost city* of the Incas . . ."

As the curtain descends, we hear them saying again, more urgently, "Mr. Cornelius, Mr. Cornelius". But he has not looked up yet from staring at the Andes.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

Office, as before. Wednesday afternoon.

JUDY is working down left, typing letters. MISS PORRIN is carefully copying out some figures at her desk at the back. Then MISS PORRIN obviously comes to the end of the task, for she closes the office books she has been glancing at, rises with two sheets of paper in her hand. JUDY keeps on typing. As MISS PORRIN moves towards the door of the Private Office, it opens and CORNELIUS comes out a step or two. He is holding a half-finished glass of stout in one hand and a half-eaten ham sandwich in the other. He is chewing the sandwich as he comes out.

MISS PORRIN (*eagerly*): Oh—Mr. Cornelius——

CORNELIUS (*his mouth rather full*): Yes?

MISS PORRIN (*showing papers*): I've got those figures out for you—if you should want them at the meeting this afternoon.

CORNELIUS (*looking at them as she holds the papers out*): Yes, might be very useful—very useful indeed. They're for the last three years, of course?

MISS PORRIN: Yes, they cover everything for the last three years. And you'll find them quite accurate.

CORNELIUS: I'm sure I shall. Thanks very much, Miss Porrin. You ought to be going off and getting some lunch now. You're very late.

MISS PORRIN: Oh—it doesn't matter. I—I never eat much lunch.

CORNELIUS (*thoughtfully*): No, I don't suppose I do—really. I like a better lunch than this though, only to-day I hadn't time to go out and get it. You know, Miss Porrin—(*he stops and takes a thoughtful bite of sandwich.*)

MISS PORRIN (*hopefully*): Yes, Mr. Cornelius?

CORNELIUS: There's something queer about the ham in this sandwich. I told Lawrence to get it at the pub below. I hope he did. As a rule, a pub makes you a good sandwich—a good, hearty, honest sandwich. But this ham tastes—put those figures down there, please, Miss Porrin—it tastes—there's a sort of cheesy flavour. Now why should it taste like that?

JUDY (*calmly calling across*): Because it's bad, I expect.

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MISS PORRIN (*too sweetly*): Shall I help you to finish those letters, Miss Evison?

JUDY: No thanks, I'm just doing the last.

CORNELIUS *has now put the last of his sandwich in his mouth, and has taken up the papers MISS PORRIN put down and given them another glance.*

MISS PORRIN (*eagerly*): Oh—Mr. Cornelius——

CORNELIUS (*negligently*): Yes?

MISS PORRIN: I do hope everything—everything—you know—goes on all right this afternoon at the meeting.

CORNELIUS: Yes, of course we all do.

MISS PORRIN: Oh—I don't mean just for the firm and for myself—but for your sake, Mr. Cornelius. I know you've worked so hard and been so worried and yet been so cheerful—and—and bright—and kind to us all—and you do *deserve* everything to be all right.

CORNELIUS (*rather astonished*): Well—yes, I suppose so. I don't know.

MISS PORRIN (*eagerly*): And I appreciate it. I *do* appreciate it, Mr. Cornelius. And if there's anything more I can do, just to help you—I'd love to do it, I really would.

She looks beseechingly up at him. He stares at her, rather embarrassed.

CORNELIUS: No thank you, Miss Porrin. There's absolutely nothing else you can do, and you've been very very helpful. Now go and get some lunch. And don't worry about this meeting. Mr. Murrison will be back and then we'll surprise some of these creditors.

MISS PORRIN (*timidly laying a finger on his arm, then hastily withdrawing it, then smiling and blinking*): Oh—I do hope so. (*She goes quickly for her hat and coat and puts them on.*)

CORNELIUS: And don't forget you needn't come back until about five. That'll give us time to get the meeting over. You needn't come back at all this afternoon——

MISS PORRIN (*with a false brightness*): Yes, of course I will. There may be lots and lots to do.

As she hurries out, CORNELIUS takes a last drink of his stout and JUDY takes her last letter out of the machine and begins reading it over.

CORNELIUS (*almost to himself*): There's something very queer about Miss Porrin these days——

JUDY (*calmly*): She's in love with you.

CORNELIUS (*humorously exaggerating a real note of protest*): Miss Judy Evison. You can't come into this office—this place of business, this commercial establishment—saying things like that.

JUDY: Why not?

CORNELIUS: Because it won't do. It's all wrong. We don't talk like that here. It's not the sort of thing that's going on here.

JUDY: But it's true. I saw it at once. I could have told you on Monday.

CORNELIUS: Well, I'm very glad you didn't tell me on Monday. And I'm sorry you've told me now.

JUDY: So am I if you feel like that about it. But you wanted to know why she's queer. That's why she's queer. (*Laughs.*) She thinks you're absolutely marvellous.

CORNELIUS (*with rather hastily assumed dignity*): Miss Porrin has been working with me here for some years now——

JUDY (*demurely*): I've finished the letters you gave me, Mr. Cornelius. Will you sign them please? (*Bringing them over.*)

CORNELIUS: You'd better clear the things off your desk before you go. We shall have to get the place ready for the meeting.

He goes into the Private Office with the letters, leaving the door open slightly. JUDY tidies up her desk and begins singing. He returns with the signed letters. She stops singing, naturally—not suddenly breaking off.

CORNELIUS: Here you are. (*Handing her the letters.*) You know, you've got a very pretty voice there, a very pretty voice. Done much singing?

JUDY (*putting the letters into their envelopes*): I had a few lessons once.

CORNELIUS: You ought to keep on with it. (*Takes out his pipe and looks at it.*) Wonder if I ought to smoke?

JUDY: Why not?

CORNELIUS: I'm thinking about these creditors. We don't want them coming in here—sniffing—and saying to themselves "Place reeks of tobacco. These people come here to smoke, not to do business." But then—why should they? I've been a creditor myself in my time, and I never talked like that. (*Lights his pipe, then laughs.*)

JUDY (*who has just finished her envelopes*): What's the matter?

CORNELIUS: I was just thinking it's a pity we can't give these creditors a good entertainment this afternoon instead of a meeting.

JUDY (*amused*): That would be grand.

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CORNELIUS: You could sing—you sing very nicely, y'know—a very pretty voice there—and I'd—er——

JUDY: Yes, what would you do?

CORNELIUS: I do a very good card trick. The four Jacks represent four commercial travellers. Do you know it? I must show it to you some time. But you'd better get away to lunch now. What do you eat for lunch?

JUDY (*amused*): Oh—all sorts of things. Poached eggs on toast. Or fish-cakes. Or tongue and salad. You know.

CORNELIUS (*looking at her appreciatively*): Yes. Funny. Somehow I can't imagine you eating at all.

JUDY (*laughing*): I eat a lot.

CORNELIUS: Can't imagine it. Now your sister—though she's not a big girl—I could imagine her tucking into enormous steak and kidney puddings and then having two helpings of treacle tart—but you? No. You must let me see you eat some time, will you?

JUDY: Well, I don't think you'd find it very amusing. But you can if you like. (*Prepares to go.*) Oh—do you want me to come back again—after you've finished the meeting?

CORNELIUS: Well—what do you think?

JUDY (*with obvious reluctance*): I will—if you really want me to. Only——

CORNELIUS: No, no, that's all right. Don't bother.

JUDY (*smiling at him*): Thank you. Good-bye.

She goes. CORNELIUS crosses slowly to her desk, still smiling at his thought of her. She has left a glove behind on the desk. He picks it up, smooths it out, then contrasts it with his own hand, smiling at the two of them together. While he is doing this, JUDY hurries in, rather breathless.

I left a glove. Oh—you've got it.

CORNELIUS (*rather confused*): Yes—I was just wondering whether I could give you a shout down the stairs—and——

JUDY (*smiling*): Here I am. (*Taking glove.*) Thank you.

She hurries out. CORNELIUS frowns now, as if dismissing the trivialities of life, and rather importantly surveys the office, obviously trying to decide where to seat the creditors. Having got them seated, he takes up a position and begins rehearsing a speech to himself, then changes his position. Then he warms to his work of speechifying, finally saying out loud: "Gentlemen, I put it to you. You are men of business. So are we." In the middle of this, BIDDLE enters and looks at CORNELIUS in mild astonishment.

CORNELIUS (*catching sight of him and breaking off rather confusedly*): Oh—hello, Biddle. Where's Lawrence?

BIDDLE: Isn't he back yet, sir? He ought to be. (*Begins taking off coat.*)

CORNELIUS: Of course he ought. Most important afternoon in the whole history of the firm, and we can't get the office boy back in time. Typical—typical of the whole—er—of everything nowadays. We must get this place ready for the meeting, Biddle. I was just wondering where to put them.

BIDDLE (*going to hang things up*): I don't suppose they mind where we put 'em, sir, as long as we can promise 'em some money.

CORNELIUS: That's all very well, but there's an art in these things. Put them in one place and they'll all be bad-tempered. Put them in another, and they'll be on our side all the time. Now I think—over there. (*Pointing.*) Let's see, how many of them will there be?

BIDDLE: Not more than eight, I should say.

CORNELIUS: Eight would go there nicely. I can see them sitting there, thoroughly pleased with themselves. Now what about chairs?

BIDDLE: This will do for one. (*Takes JUDY'S chair and puts it in place.*)

CORNELIUS: And this for another. (*Taking another chair down.*)

BIDDLE (*stopping as he goes for another chair*): You know, Mr. Cornelius, I don't like that chap the Bank's sending round this afternoon.

CORNELIUS: Who's that? What's-his-name?

BIDDLE: Yes, Mortimer. Don't like him. Very hard, he is.

CORNELIUS: Yes. Got a face like a rat-trap. Probably that's why they send him on these jobs. They know he can make his face like a rat-trap. And yet, you know, Biddle, at home and among his pals, he's probably a very nice fellow. Digs his garden, helps the girls with their homework, plays a good game of bowls, toddles along with his missis to the pictures and pretends to be in love with Greta Garbo—eh? Just an ordinary very nice fellow. Yet he comes along here with a face like a rat-trap. As if owing a bit of money to the Middlesex and Central Bank, when they've got more money than they know what to do with, was a crime so terrible—like murdering children! D'you know what I think sometimes, Biddle?

BIDDLE: No, sir.

CORNELIUS (*very quietly*): Sometimes I think it's all bloody nonsense.

BIDDLE (*rather shocked*): No, Mr. Cornelius. Don't you go

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thinking that. Whatever you may say, business—well, it's business. You can't change that.

CORNELIUS: I don't know whether I can change it, or whether you can change it, but somebody's always changing it. I've been in business, of one kind and another, for nearly thirty years, and business has never been the same for ten years together. You know that yourself, with your experience.

BIDDLE: Ah—but after all—two and two have still got to make four.

CORNELIUS: They haven't. You ask the Middlesex and Central Bank. Now, two and two have got to make five. And if they had to make four, we couldn't do it, because we haven't got two and two, we've only got two and one. These fellows who are coming here this afternoon, Biddle, they don't want chaps like you as cashiers. They want Einstein.

BIDDLE (*chuckling*): There's something in that.

CORNELIUS: Yes, Einstein as cashier, and Mussolini and Hitler and the storm troops as salesmen.

BIDDLE: Well, I must say I'm very glad to see you in such good spirits, Mr. Cornelius. I've been very worried myself about this afternoon.

CORNELIUS: Have you?—so have I.

BIDDLE (*confidentially*): Tell me, sir, what do you think our chances are?

CORNELIUS (*confidentially*): If they'd had to depend on me, Biddle, I'd tell you now our chances were nil. We'd be finished. You know how things stand here.

BIDDLE (*sadly*): Only too well, sir.

CORNELIUS: But they don't depend on me. They depend on Murrison. He's coming back this afternoon, he's going to talk to these fellows, and he's visited every good customer we've ever had. He's not said much in his letters, but I know Bob Murrison, and I know he's coming back with something good up his sleeve.

BIDDLE (*dubiously*): I hope so.

CORNELIUS: When the head of a decent firm like this goes himself—and when he's Bob Murrison, who knows the business inside out, who's got drive, who's got—well—charm, if you like, who they all know to be an absolutely first-class fellow—I tell you—something happens. You'll see.

BIDDLE (*still dubiously*): Yes—I've no doubt you're quite right.

CORNELIUS (*sharply, like a man compelled to face things he wishes to*

suppress and ignore): Well then—what are you talking—looking—like that for? What's the matter with you, Biddle?

BIDDLE (*stammering*): Oh—nothing at all—I'm sure you're quite right, Mr. Cornelius. It was just that Mr. Murrison didn't seem very well when he left us——

CORNELIUS (*impatiently*): That's a month ago. He was on edge a bit. He was worried. I'm worried. We're all worried. We're all on edge. That's nothing.

BIDDLE: And then—being away so long—and writing so little——

CORNELIUS: You're making something out of nothing. I know him. He wouldn't bother writing much. After all, this is his business, he's no need to explain everything he does to us. He's not like some piffing little salesman out on the road. Besides, Bob Murrison's going to surprise us. I know what he's up to. It won't be the first time. I'll bet he's absolutely hypnotised those miserable devils in the north. He's got them eating aluminium out of his hand.

Enter LAWRENCE.

Where have you been all this time?

LAWRENCE (*sulkily*): You told me to go to the Excelsior Transport Company before I came back. (*Hangs hat and coat up.*)

CORNELIUS (*irritably*): Well, you've been long enough about it. Bring some chairs in from the private office. And don't look so sulky. I'm tired of seeing you look sulky. Too many miserable, sulky-looking people about.

LAWRENCE gives a very audible grunt.

Now what does that mean?

LAWRENCE stands silent.

Well?

LAWRENCE (*flaring up*): It means I'm sick of it.

CORNELIUS (*astonished*): Sick of what?

LAWRENCE: Sick of this place, sick of filling inkwells and copying letters and running silly little errands. I've done it nearly five years now. I'm not a kid any longer. I'm nineteen. Lots of my pals have got proper jobs now, and here I am still doing kid's work. Well, I don't care if the firm does go bankrupt. I've had enough of it.

He goes into the Private Office for chairs, leaving CORNELIUS to exchange a glance of astonishment with BIDDLE, who also shakes his head. When LAWRENCE returns with two chairs, CORNELIUS looks fixedly at him.

CORNELIUS (*quietly*): Just a minute, Lawrence.

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LAWRENCE *looks at him and as if almost drawn against his will comes nearer, then stands near.*

LAWRENCE (*mumbling*): I'm sorry I said that—that last bit, Mr Cornelius.

CORNELIUS: All right. And I'm sorry we've never had a better job to offer you. If you can find one, go and get it. What do you want to do?

LAWRENCE: Something to do with wireless and gramophones. I'm really interested in them.

CORNELIUS: And so is everybody else of your age, as far as I can see. Wireless and gramophones and motor-cars and aeroplanes. Making a noise and rushing off somewhere. And how everybody's going to make a living out of that, beats me. But if you know of anything, go and get it. Go now—if you like.

LAWRENCE: What about the tea?

CORNELIUS: Oh—yes, we shall want that tray of teas.

LAWRENCE: How many?

CORNELIUS: Oh—about eight or nine. Good teas, too. Might make a difference—you never know. About four o'clock. Now you can go, and you needn't come back until you bring the teas.

LAWRENCE *takes his hat and coat and goes.*

BIDDLE (*who has been in the background*): Do you want me to stay—or not, Mr. Cornelius?

CORNELIUS: Well, I think you'd better not. You can come back later.

BIDDLE: Of course. I'm anxious to see Mr. Murrison. Now is this about how you'll want it? (*Referring to chairs.*)

CORNELIUS (*thoughtfully surveying them*): Might just have these two here—(*moves them.*) Like that.

BIDDLE: It's a funny thing, Mr. Cornelius, but to-day's the fifteenth of the month.

CORNELIUS (*still staring at the chairs*): Don't see anything funny about that.

BIDDLE (*laughs*): No, of course. Nothing funny in its being the fifteenth. There has to be a fifteenth. But what's funny is that this is—or may be—an important day in the life of the firm and so an important day in my life. And it's the fifteenth. The fifteenth's always been my day. My birthday's on the fifteenth. I was married on the fifteenth. We live at Number 15.

CORNELIUS: Oh, you took that house because it was Number 15. That doesn't count.

BIDDLE: I assure you, we didn't. Just chance, you might say. That is, if there is such a thing as chance, which I doubt. And then, after being a member of our chess club for fifteen years, I took office as president three months ago—on the fifteenth. Now I've spent a lot of my life dealing with figures and numbers, and I believe there's more in 'em than meets the eye. I do, Mr. Cornelius. Take nine, for instance——

A sharp knock on the door. BIDDLE goes to open it, and admits a youngish foreigner, very sedately dressed, and carrying a black attaché or brief case. BIDDLE steps back a pace or two, and the visitor steps inside the room, bows and produces a card.

FOREIGNER (with very marked foreign accent): Messrs. Briggs and Murrizon? I am Doc-tor Schweig—coming here for the hour of Hecht and Drapok——

CORNELIUS (going forward): Yes, of course. How d'you do, Doctor—er—Schweig?

FOREIGNER: You are Mis-ter Murrizon?—Schweig.

CORNELIUS: No, my name's Cornelius. I'm Mr. Murrison's partner. He'll be back in time for the meeting. We're expecting him any time now. Sit down, won't you?

SCHWEIG (gravely): T'ank you. (*Sits down rather ceremoniously on the nearest of the arranged chairs, keeping his hat and case on his knee.*)

CORNELIUS: Yes—er——(*nothing comes of this.*)

SCHWEIG: It is co-old, eh?

CORNELIUS (eagerly): Yes, it is cold, isn't it?

BIDDLE: Very cold.

CORNELIUS: We were saying that. Very cold.

SCHWEIG: But no fog.

CORNELIUS: No, no fog.

SCHWEIG: Always, I am thankful when I am in London to see no fog.

CORNELIUS: Yes, I can understand that. Quite right. I say, Biddle, I think we ought to have a table of some sort here. We forgot that. Let's bring that one over.

They take over a small table, facing the chairs. They have just got this into position when a brisk ratty type of Cockney pops his head in.

BRISK MAN: This is it, isn't it? Thought so. (*He comes in.*) Mr. Cornelius, isn't it? Central Forwarding Company—Fletcher. Sit here, I suppose. (*Sits down, turns to SCHWEIG.*) Bit early, are we? Must be.

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SCHWEIG (*consulting watch*): I was told to com' at fifteen minutes past three o'clock. Now it is seventeen minutes past three o'clock.

FLETCHER: Oh, you're making a stop-watch job of it.

SCHWEIG (*puzzled*): Pleass?

FLETCHER: Never mind. Well, Mr. Cornelius, how's everything looking?

CORNELIUS: Fine.

FLETCHER: That's right. Never say die.

BIDDLE, who has now put on his hat and coat, reaches the door and opens it to find an elderly man standing outside. This elderly man has an untidy grey beard and is shabbily dressed in an old-fashioned style. He is carrying a number of leaflets. BIDDLE steps back to let him in and he comes just inside the door and stands there beaming rather foolishly.

ELDERLY MAN: Good afternoon, friends.

BIDDLE: Are you here for the meeting?

ELDERLY MAN: I don't know.

BIDDLE: Do you represent any of the creditors?

ELDERLY MAN: Certainly I do, sir. Certainly I do.

CORNELIUS (*rather irritably*): Well, come and sit down, my dear sir. Don't stand in the doorway. All right, Biddle, don't wait.

BIDDLE goes, after a puzzled backward glance at the elderly man, who now takes another short step or two forward and continues to beam on the company.

ELDERLY MAN (*very quietly*): I represent the biggest creditor of all, everybody's creditor—God.

CORNELIUS stares at him. FLETCHER gives a guffaw.

FLETCHER: Thought I'd seen him before. He's one o' these sort of apostles you see about, that's what he is.

CORNELIUS: My dear chap, you can't come in here talking to us about God. We're busy. We have an important meeting on. This is business.

ELDERLY MAN: Whose business? Is it God's business? He's here, you know.

FLETCHER: Well, if he's here, we shan't need you. (*Guffaws.*)

ELDERLY MAN (*offering CORNELIUS some pamphlets*): Read these at your leisure, friend.

CORNELIUS (*taking them*): All right, thanks, I will. But you'll have to go now—

ELDERLY MAN (*quietly at first*): I am going. But I wish I could lend you my vision of you, friends, if only for a moment. I see you in a little place—like a very small fragile raft—in mid-air—and Heaven is bright above you, bright with your guardian angels—and (*his voice takes on a rather sing-song dramatic tone*) below you—gaping and roaring—is hell and eternal damnation.

FLETCHER: Oh—gertcha!

CORNELIUS (*as if about to push him out*): My dear chap, we simply can't have you here talking---

ELDERLY MAN (*who has reached the door and opened it*): Friends, I leave behind with you the thought of our Father in Heaven.

MRS. READE, *a fussily dressed woman of about 40, is seen behind him. He too sees her.*

And with you too, sister.

~~MRS. READE~~: Me what?

ELDERLY MAN: The thought of our Father in Heaven.

He brushes past her. She looks after him for a second, flustered and indignant, then comes a step or so into the room.

MRS. READE: Oh—he gave me quite a turn with his Father in Heaven. They oughtn't to let old men go about talking like that.

SCHWEIG (*rising, gravely*): Quite so, madame. In my country he would be shut up as a madman.

CORNELIUS: Oh—no. You can't do that.

SCHWEIG: But he is mad.

CORNELIUS: A bit mad. But most of us are a bit mad here. Where you come from, it's probably different.

MRS. READE (*with social manner*): I ought to have introduced myself. This is where you're having the creditors' meeting, isn't it?

CORNELIUS (*staring at her*): Yes. But——

MRS. READE: Well, I'm Mrs. Reade.

CORNELIUS: Oh!

MRS. READE: I don't suppose that means much to you, does it? But my uncle, Mr. Samuel Rigby—I keep house for him—he owns this property. You're his tenants, you see. And he couldn't come himself—he's got a bit of sciatica to-day—he told me about this meeting this morning. And so I said: "Well, uncle, let me go. I've never been to such a thing before and I can tell you what happens and it'll be a bit of a change." And he said I could if I wanted to. So I did. I can sit anywhere, I suppose?

CORNELIUS (*rather wearily*): Yes, anywhere.

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MRS. READE: I think I'll try this.

Sits down, looks about her, and smiles at SCHWEIG and FLETCHER.

CORNELIUS *looks impatiently at his watch, then goes into the Private Office, leaving the door ajar behind him.*

(*After clearing her throat.*) Well, we're having a nice day for it, aren't we? I mean, taking it all round. It's cold—but it's what I should call a healthy cold.

FLETCHER (*indifferently*): It's what I should call it too.

He pulls a bit of paper out of his inner pocket and begins examining some figures written on it.

MRS. READE (*mainly to SCHWEIG*): I expect you gentlemen are used to this sort of thing, but it's quite new to me. A brand-new experience, you might call it.

SCHWEIG (*not taking it in*): Pleass?

MRS. READE (*brightly*): Yes, you're foreign, aren't you? I guessed you were. (*The telephone bell rings.*) There, that's the telephone. Always at it. Ring, ring, ring.

CORNELIUS *comes out hastily from the Private Office, as the telephone has not been switched through.*

CORNELIUS (*eagerly, at telephone*): That you, Bob? (*Disappointed.*) Oh! No, we're not interested. (*Puts receiver down.*)

Here, if it is convenient to have one or two nondescript creditors—youngish or middle-aged men—they should enter, and quietly take their seats. They are followed by PRITCHET and MORTIMER. PRITCHET is a middle-aged solicitor, with one of those curiously hollow booming voices that some legal men have. MORTIMER is the bank man with the face like a rat-trap. He should have a worrying ratty manner. Both carry small cases.

PRITCHET (*booming*): Ah—good afternoon. Sorry if we're a little late. I'm Pritchett of Cattermole, MacIvor and Pritchett. (*Going nearer to CORNELIUS and producing slip of paper.*) We represent several foreign clients who are—er—interested in these proceedings. You'll find their names there—eh?

CORNELIUS (*glancing at paper*): Yes. Old friends of ours. Good afternoon, Mr. Mortimer.

MORTIMER: Good afternoon, Mr. Cornelius.

CORNELIUS: Sit down, gentlemen.

As they do, MRS. READE's voice can be heard.

MRS. READE: Do you think we're all here now?

CORNELIUS: That's what I was wondering, madam. I think I can

take it that we are. (*He goes to door, looks out, then closes the door and carefully and rather importantly takes up a position facing the creditors.*)
Gentlemen—I beg your pardon, madam—

MRS. READE (*flattered by this notice*): It's quite all right, thank you.

CORNELIUS (*grandly*): Gentlemen and you, madam—I propose first to outline our position to you. Three years ago—

PRITCHET (*booming unpleasantly*): One moment, please.

CORNELIUS: What's the matter?

PRITCHET: This is not quite in order.

CORNELIUS (*taken aback*): Oh!

PRITCHET: No. This is a meeting of your creditors, my dear sir. You are not one of your own creditors. Therefore you can't take charge of the meeting in this manner.

FLETCHER: That's right.

PRITCHET: I propose that Mr. Mortimer of the Middlesex and Central Bank should take the chair.

FLETCHER: And I beg to second that.

PRITCHET: All in agreement? (*A few hands go up.*) Carried, I think. Mr. Mortimer, will you please take charge of the meeting?

MORTIMER, *silent, goes forward and occupies the chair near where
CORNELIUS is standing, putting it away a little first, so that
CORNELIUS is left, so to speak, in the air.*

CORNELIUS (*not without irony*): What do I do now? Leave the room?

MRS. READE (*whispering loudly*): I hope not. I like him.

MORTIMER: I don't think that will be necessary just now. Do you, Mr. Pritchett?

PRITCHET: No, not yet.

MORTIMER: Is your partner, Mr. Murrison, here, Mr. Cornelius?

CORNELIUS: No.

MORTIMER: But I understood—

CORNELIUS (*impatiently*): Mr. Murrison will be here any moment now.

PRITCHET: This seems to me all very irregular—

CORNELIUS (*bitterly*): That's how it seems to me too, very irregular. Everything's irregular. That's why we're all here to-day.

FLETCHER: Only we're not all here. Your partner isn't, for one—
(*Laughs.*)

CORNELIUS: My partner has been travelling the country for the last

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few weeks. He's been visiting all our customers, chiefly in the Midlands and the North. He's coming straight back from seeing the last of them to this meeting this afternoon.

SCHWEIG: He hopes to get more orders for your houz, eh?

CORNELIUS: Yes. He knows all there is to know about the aluminium trade.

MRS. READE: The what?

CORNELIUS: The aluminium trade, madam. This firm imports aluminium from abroad and sells it to hardware manufacturers.

MRS. READE: Just fancy!

MORTIMER: But don't you employ a traveller?

PRITCHET: Just what I was about to ask, Mr. Mortimer.

CORNELIUS: We had a traveller, but about two months ago we dismissed him.

FLETCHER: What for?

MORTIMER: Was he inefficient?

CORNELIUS: He wasn't at first—

PRITCHET: But he was afterwards, eh?

CORNELIUS: I don't know.

PRITCHET: But, my dear sir, surely it's not difficult to discover whether an employee of this kind is efficient or not?

FLETCHER: 'Ear, 'ear!

CORNELIUS: At ordinary times I suppose it isn't, but in our business these aren't ordinary times. This fellow was a traveller, not a magician.

FLETCHER: And what about your partner, Murrison, then? Is he a magician?

CORNELIUS: *Mister* Murrison is a first-class business man and a wonderful fellow. And this little firm means everything to him. If it hadn't, he wouldn't have gone on this trip. He wasn't very well when he went. We'd had an anxious time here—

MORTIMER (*impatiently*): Yes, yes, Mr. Cornelius, we've all had anxious times. But meanwhile, we're busy men.

PRITCHET: Quite so.

CORNELIUS: Just a minute! (*Listens.*) All right. Sorry!

PRITCHET: I must say if I'd known that your senior partner was absent—

CORNELIUS: He knows about this. He'll be here any minute now.

FLETCHER (*sceptically*): With luck.

CORNELIUS: What do you mean?

FLETCHER: You 'eard me.

CORNELIUS: I resent that remark, particularly from you.

FLETCHER (*pugnaciously*): Oh—and why from me?

CORNELIUS: You wouldn't understand if I told you.

MORTIMER: Gentlemen, this is a business meeting. We don't want that sort of talk.

PRITCHET: I should think not indeed. How long is this Mr. Murrison going to be?

FLETCHER: God knows.

MORTIMER: I'm not prepared to wait more than ten minutes at the outside——

PRITCHET: Nor I.

CORNELIUS: I tell you he'll be here any minute now.

SCHWEIG (*standing up*): Mister—er—Gornelius wass going to gif us a stademendt—some figures—of the position of the houz. I think he might gif us that stademendt—pleass. (*Sits down.*)

CORNELIUS (*eagerly*): Yes, of course.

MORTIMER: All right, Mr. Cornelius.

Moves his chair so that CORNELIUS, who is still standing, now holds the floor. CORNELIUS produces paper given to him by MISS PORRIN.

CORNELIUS: Well gentlemen—and you, madam—up to three years ago, our annual gross turnover, averaged over the previous five years, was eighty-five thousand pounds——

SCHWEIG (*who is writing it down*): Pleass? Eighty-five t'ousand pounds?

CORNELIUS: Eighty-five thousand pounds, with an annual net profit ranging from eleven thousand pounds at the beginning of the period to about eight thousand at the end—— (*Pauses.*)

SCHWEIG (*murmuring as he writes*): Eleven t'ousand pounds to eight t'ousand pounds.

CORNELIUS (*reminiscently*): We were doing very well. We were very fine people. It was a good life. You were always delighted to see us at the Middlesex and Central Bank, Mr. Mortimer. Those French clients of yours, Mr. Pritchett, used to send us little presents. Mr. Fletcher here and his Forwarding Company couldn't do enough for us. You all respected us. And really, gentlemen, now I come to think of it, I don't know why you should all have been so affable and respectful then. It was all very easy. We bought the metal, turned it over to our customers, made a nice profit. All very easy, very simple, nothing to

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boast about at all. (*He looks round, smiling, and catches MRS. READE'S eye.*)

MRS. READE (*brightly*): No, I see.

CORNELIUS (*impressively*): Thank you, madam. And then it all changed. My God—how it changed! A sort of nightmare. Every country seemed to be announcing that it must sell more goods than it would buy.

MORTIMER: Isn't this all rather beside the point?

PRITCHET: Hear, hear!

CORNELIUS (*with increasing animation*): It may be beside the point in the Middlesex and Central Bank or near the Law Courts, but it isn't beside the point here. Look what happened. The pound sterling was worth twenty shillings here and only twelve shillings somewhere else. Some countries you couldn't get money into. Some countries you couldn't get money out of. You could send goods in a ship with a blue flag but not in a ship with a red flag. It wasn't business any more. It was a game of snakes and ladders—but without the ladders.

PRITCHET: I really don't see——

CORNELIUS: All right, don't see. But you've got to understand what was happening to us. I've never got much fun out of selling aluminium. And whether Briggs and Murrison of Birdcage Street, Holborn, ever sold any aluminium to anybody couldn't be of any real importance to the world. But—by God!—if we'd been trying to take a lifeboat out to a wreck, we couldn't have tried harder, couldn't have worried and argued and schemed and pleaded more than we did in this office. And what's it all about? If we've to live by private trade, then let it be private trade. Why have they made it like a lunatics' obstacle race? Why are we condemned to scheme and scratch, in these cubby-holes? I tell you, a blind monkey could find a better life to live than we've lately had here . . .

MORTIMER (*sharply*): Mr. Cornelius.

PRITCHET (*sharply*): I thought you were going to give us a statement.

CORNELIUS: I am. (*Deliberately.*) Unless my partner's been working miracles—and I don't say he hasn't, because he's a desperate man and a wonder—but unless he's worked a few miracles, this firm's broke, bankrupt, bust. And now you can pass a few resolutions on that.

He holds it a moment, during which his audience, aghast, can only gape at him. Then he turns away.

MRS. READE *breaks the spell.*

MRS. READE: Well, I enjoyed that, I must say.

FLETCHER: I can't see what that stuff's got to do with us——

PRITCHET: I really must protest very strongly against this most un-businesslike proceeding——

MORTIMER: Mr. Cornelius, you haven't made any attempt to give us a statement——

CORNELIUS (*holding up his hand, forcefully*): Just a minute, just a minute——

He listens in the quiet that follows, then hurries to the door. The creditors watch him and a low buzz of talk breaks out amongst them. CORNELIUS opens the door and discovers MURRISON at the other side. MURRISON is a man about fifty, who is looking very worn. He is wearing a big overcoat and carrying his hat in his hand. His manner from the first should be quick, nervous, jerky, strange.

(*With affectionate warmth.*) Hello, Bob old boy! Fine! We're all ready for you.

MURRISON (*now inside the room, with a quick glance at the creditors, sharply*): What? What d'you mean?

CORNELIUS: The meeting, y'know. Did you come straight from the station, Bob?

MURRISON: Yes. Straight from the station. The taxi-man's bringing my bags up. (*Whispering.*) You see him out there, Jim, and pay him for me. I don't like the look of him.

CORNELIUS (*hastily concealing his surprise and some misgivings*): Of course I will, old boy.

CORNELIUS goes out, and is heard off calling to the taximan: "Put them down just in here, will you? That's right. How much? Here you are." Meanwhile, MURRISON has very carefully crossed to the Private Office door, ignoring the "Good afternoon, Mr. Murrison" of Mr. MORTIMER. MURRISON goes into the Private Office, so that for a moment or two the creditors are left to themselves. MORTIMER is seen exchanging a puzzled glance with PRITCHET. CORNELIUS returns, looks for MURRISON, then goes over to the Private Office. There should be an atmosphere of suspense and tension evoked in this little scene.

CORNELIUS (*looking into Private Office*): Ready, Bob?

CORNELIUS should go to the alcove at the back and bring down the only remaining chair, putting it behind the small table. MURRISON slowly opens the door and enters hesitatingly. He has taken overcoat off.

Here you are, sit here, Bob.

MURRISON (*in a loud harsh voice that is startling*): Why are you

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sitting like this? We want the lights on. Pull that blind down, Jim. I'll put the lights on.

CORNELIUS, *after a brief surprised look at MURRISON, hastily goes to the window and pulls down the blind. MURRISON goes to the switch and puts on the lights.*

(*Irritably.*) There's another light somewhere.

MORTIMER: Come, come, Mr. Murrison, we've got plenty of light in here now.

MURRISON (*irritably*): I want that other light on.

Goes and switches it on. There is now the maximum of light on the stage and it is almost an uncomfortable glare, the lights being very white. Coming back from switching on the last light, MURRISON stops and looks searchingly at MRS. READE.

What's that woman doing here?

CORNELIUS: That's all right, old man. She's only the landlord's niece——

MRS. READE (*who is suddenly alarmed and has risen*): You needn't bother telling him who I am. Because I'm going. (*As she threads her way towards the door, agitatedly.*) And you might as well all go, if you'll take my advice. It's no good staying here—with that man.

Indicating MURRISON. She is now at the door. Her voice rises and trembles as she points at MURRISON, who is still looking at her.

You've only got to look at him to see——

She goes hastily, the door hanging to. Some of the creditors, who have half-risen, remain like that for a moment.

CORNELIUS (*reassuringly*): That's all right. She's better out of the way. We can get on now.

MORTIMER (*who has been bewildered*): I hope so. (*Looking at his watch.*) Really, gentlemen, I must ask you——

CORNELIUS (*cutting in, to MURRISON*): Bob, you'd better tell them at once what you've been able to do.

MURRISON is now sitting behind the small table, facing the meeting. CORNELIUS is standing a little behind, to one side.

MURRISON (*in a low uncertain tone*): It's very difficult. (*He covers his face with his hands for a moment.*) There were two men following me all the time. No, not all the time. Not at first. But nearly all the time.

CORNELIUS (*bewildered*): Following you!

MURRISON (*rather louder now*): Everywhere I went. When I went up to Scotland, one of them tried to get into my railway carriage. But

I knew him. (*He looks round suspiciously.*) How did they always know where I was going?

MORTIMER (*firmly*): Well, never mind about that for the time being, Mr. Murrison. We understand that you've been visiting all your customers. And naturally before we reach any conclusion here, we want to hear the result of those visits.

CORNELIUS: Yes. How did you get on, old man? Tell us.

MURRISON (*with passion*): I am telling you. I'm telling you that everywhere I went, I was followed by two men. And there were—other things. (*His voice dropping.*) Worse than that. They tried to poison my food.

CORNELIUS (*expostulating*): Bob!

MURRISON (*excitedly*): They knew where I was going all the time. They sent somebody in advance to all the people who'd been buying from us. Some of our oldest customers wouldn't see me. Why? Because they'd been told filthy lies about us by this fellow who'd been sent ahead of me. I tell you—it's been hell.

FLETCHER (*disgustedly*): Here, come off it!

SCHWEIG (*standing up*): I think, please——

MURRISON (*quickly*): Who's that? (*SCHWEIG sits down.*) Some sort of foreigner, isn't he? Why should he come here?

CORNELIUS (*patting him on the shoulder*): Bob, old man, you're tired. Take it easy.

MURRISON: You'd be tired. Followed, watched, spied on, day after day. Trying to get at you. There was something about it in the paper yesterday. I expect you'll be reading a lot about it in the papers soon. They'll try to get at me here. They won't leave me alone—— (*Beginning to break down.*) Oh God!—why can't they leave me alone?

CORNELIUS (*bending over him*): It's all right, old man, now. You've nothing to worry about. (*He looks up, and makes a waving gesture to the creditors for them to go, then looks down again.*) You're only a bit done up. You'll be all right after a rest. (*To the creditors, in a low, rather tense tone.*) I'm sorry, gentlemen, but I must ask you to go.

Some of the creditors get up, but nobody makes for the door. They are all staring at MURRISON, who is sitting with his head between his hands.

MURRISON (*not raising his head*): It's no use, Jim. I'm finished. They're torturing me. (*Breaks down again.*)

CORNELIUS (*very gently, bending over him*): No, no, no. That's all right, Bob, old man. (*Looks up and sees the creditors watching them. Then, with tremendous passion.*) For Christ's sake—get out, can't you?

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As if completely dominated by his will and passion, they begin to move towards the door at once. As soon as he sees that they are all on the move, he turns away from them and bends over MURRISON, who is still sitting with bowed head. Nothing is said until they are alone.

MURRISON (*raising his head and suddenly giving a short harsh laugh*): They've all gone, you see. (*Laughs again.*) I got rid of them, Jim. It wasn't hard. But it took me to do it, eh? (*Laughs.*)

CORNELIUS (*standing back and staring*): What, are you all right, Bob?

MURRISON (*irritably*): Of course I am. Why shouldn't I be?

CORNELIUS (*relieved*): My dear chap, I don't know what the devil you were playing at with those fellows. And I don't care so long as you're all right. (*Claps him heartily on the shoulder.*)

MURRISON (*sharply*): Don't do that.

CORNELIUS: Sorry, old man. I expect you're tired.

MURRISON (*slowly*): No, but—nearly all the time—I have a pain here. (*Puts his hand to top of his head.*)

CORNELIUS (*heartily*): Really? How did you get that?

MURRISON (*solemnly, emphatically*): Some sort of poison, Jim. Didn't I tell you?

CORNELIUS: No. But tell me now how you got on? Have we got a chance?

MURRISON (*shakes head, irritably*): I've already told you. They sent somebody in advance—to warn all the customers——

CORNELIUS: But who did?

MURRISON: I told you. I was followed all the time. There were two men——

CORNELIUS (*taking him by the shoulders, earnestly*): How! How! For God's sake, Bob, stop talking like that. You're talking to me now—Jim Cornelius. There couldn't have been two men following you all the time. You imagined it.

MURRISON (*withdrawing himself, sharply*): That's a lie. You know it's a lie.

CORNELIUS (*on whom the horrible truth is dawning again*): No, I don't.

MURRISON: Are you going to begin lying to me now, Jim? Won't anybody tell me the truth. (*Confusedly*) There was a waiter in the hotel last night—he looked a decent sort of chap—but when I asked him if anybody had been trying to tamper with my drink—he wouldn't tell me the truth. And I knew all the time. He ought to have seen that (*Laughs.*) I knew.

CORNELIUS (*agonised, under his breath*): Oh—God! (*Approaching*

MURRISON *again.*) Don't talk like that, old man. Please. Just for my sake.

LAWRENCE *enters, rather proudly, carrying a large tray, on which are about nine cups of tea and a plate of cut cake and biscuits. He is out of breath.*

MURRISON (*suspiciously, sharply*): What's this? I don't want any tea.

CORNELIUS (*impatiently*): Take it away.

LAWRENCE (*gasping*): But—where—to?

CORNELIUS: Anywhere—anywhere—back to the tea-shop.

LAWRENCE: They'll—want—paying for it.

CORNELIUS: Oh—all right—take this—

Goes over and throws half a crown on to the tray. After a curious stare at MURRISON, LAWRENCE goes out. CORNELIUS returns to MURRISON.

Bob, will you listen to me—quietly—for a minute?

MURRISON (*sullenly*): What is it?

CORNELIUS: It doesn't matter just what's going to happen to us here. Never mind about that. You're tired. You're not well. This journey's upset you. Go home now—never mind about business—and just see your doctor, old man. Tell him about this pain in your head.

MURRISON (*slowly shaking his head*): No. No. He wouldn't believe me.

CORNELIUS: Why not?

MURRISON (*with sinister air of secrecy*): I've never liked that doctor of ours, Jim. Once or twice, when he thought I wasn't noticing, I've caught him looking very strangely at me. I couldn't trust him.

CORNELIUS (*now deeply distressed*): But you can trust me, can't you, Bob? We've been partners, we've been pals, for a good long time now. You know there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, old man. And I don't like to see you ill—like this. We need you down here, Bob. We can't get on without you. So if you really don't like this doctor of yours, see another one—there are plenty about, good ones too—

MURRISON: It's no use, Jim. It's no use.

CORNELIUS (*with deep affection*): Of course it is. Think of the good times we've had together—even here, in this office. And we'll have some more, won't we? If we can't keep this business going, we'll get out of it and start another—something quite different. What do you say? (*A noise outside.*)

MURRISON (*startled*): What's that?

BIDDLE *enters.*

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BIDDLE: Hello, Mr. Murrison. I nearly fell over your bags out there.

CORNELIUS, *behind MURRISON, puts his hand to his mouth as a sign to BIDDLE to keep quiet.*

CORNELIUS: You'll do that, won't you, Bob?

MURRISON: All right. (*Gets up and fumbles in his pockets, finally producing some keys.*) There's something I want, first. (*Goes slowly into Private Office.*)

CORNELIUS *immediately crosses to BIDDLE.*

BIDDLE (*anxiously*): Is anything wrong, sir?

CORNELIUS (*quickly and softly*): Yes, but there's no time to explain. Go out and get a taxi for Mr. Murrison, and then telephone at once—from that box at the corner—to his house, tell them he's coming home and ask them to get a good doctor in to see him, as he's not very well. That clear?

BIDDLE (*softly*): Yes. Taxi, then telephone.

MURRISON *has come out of the Private Office, carrying a rather bright revolver in his hand. He holds it just long enough to be seen, then slips it into his pocket.*

And he'll want the bags in, of course.

MURRISON (*as BIDDLE moves off*): What are you two muttering about there?

CORNELIUS (*with forced cheerfulness*): Nothing, old man. I was just asking Biddle to get you a taxi.

MURRISON (*sitting down heavily, wearily*): No use, Jim, no use. (*Puts his hand to his head, then shakes it.*) Talk to me—about something different. Tell me something about yourself, Jim. Anything. Just talk.

CORNELIUS (*trying to hide his distress*): All right, Bob. You know, I'm reading a book about South America—Peru and the Andes. It's making me feel restless, making me wonder a lot, about what I've missed. You know the feeling, old man. Right on the first page, there was a sentence . . . I keep remembering it, Bob—you know how you remember some things for no reason at all . . . It said—

Now MURRISON *is leaning forward staring tragically into vacancy, while CORNELIUS has an affectionate hand on his shoulder.*
“After a week in the Indian village, we decided to take the track into the clouds, to find among those heights the lost city of the Incas . . .”

CURTAIN

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

Office as before. Friday evening, a fortnight later. The office is partly dismantled. Files and ledgers taken down from shelves, stacked in corners, some tied in bundles. The staff are obviously at work clearing things up for the last time. The door into the Private Office is open and a light is on in there. LAWRENCE is bringing files, etc., from the Private Office. MISS PORRIN can be looking through files. BIDDLE is having a last go at the ledgers. JUDY is at her table typing hard. Nothing is said for a few moments.

LAWRENCE (*stopping and yawning*): What time is it? (*There is no reply.*) Miss Porrin, what time is it?

MISS PORRIN: Twenty to eight.

LAWRENCE: I've had enough of this.

MISS PORRIN (*indignantly*): You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE (*astonished*): What for?

MISS PORRIN: On an evening like this—when everything's finishing—and you talk as if it didn't matter a bit——

LAWRENCE: Well, it doesn't to me.

MISS PORRIN: I think you're absolutely inhuman.

LAWRENCE (*muttering*): And I think you're potty.

MISS PORRIN: Don't be so rude and stupid. You ought to realise that even if you don't care about—about—all this, the rest of us do because it means a lot to us and——

BIDDLE (*turning*): What's all this about?

MISS PORRIN: I'm sorry, Mr. Biddle. But it's Lawrence—being so rude and stupid. He ought to know I can't help feeling upset, because this is really our last night here——

VOICE OF CORNELIUS (*from Private Office, quietly*): Not so much noise in there, please.

LAWRENCE *grins at MISS PORRIN, who returns to work.*

CORNELIUS' VOICE: Lawrence!

LAWRENCE *goes in and returns with a mass of papers which he dumps in a corner. Then he yawns noisily.*

JUDY (*with calm malice*): Is it the little boy's bed time?

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LAWRENCE: Don't be silly. I'm yawning because I need fresh air. I can't help it.

JUDY: Put your head out of the window.

MISS PORRIN: Oh—do please stop it.

LAWRENCE: Well, I didn't start it, did I?

The telephone rings. MISS PORRIN answers it.

MISS PORRIN: Yes, Briggs and Murrison. . . . All right. Wait a minute, please. Miss Everson, it's for you.

JUDY (*at telephone*): Yes, this is Judy . . . I know, Eric, I'm awfully sorry, but I can't help it . . . No, I-shan't be long. If you come round here, you probably won't have to wait more than a few minutes. . . Of course I will, darling. (*Puts down receiver.*)

LAWRENCE (*muttering contemptuously*): Darling!

JUDY (*going up to him*): What did you say?

LAWRENCE (*quailing*): Nothing.

JUDY returns to her table.

BIDDLE (*looking up thoughtfully from his account books*): Some very queer things in these old accounts. In December 1922 we spent fifteen shillings and threepence on cheese.

JUDY: Cheese? (*Laughs.*)

BIDDLE: Yes, cheese. (*To MISS PORRIN.*) How did we come to do that? Why should we buy cheese? And fifteen shillings and threepence worth. You could get a lot of cheese for that. Do you remember, Miss Porrin?


MISS PORRIN: No, I wasn't here then.

BIDDLE (*thoughtfully*): Of course not. I must ask my wife. I expect I told her at the time. It'll worry me if I can't remember. Cheese. 1922. Lot of queer things here.

MISS PORRIN: Here too. I never knew before that Mr. Shuttleworth—you know, of the Central Forwarding Company—was called Michael. He's not a bit like a Michael, is he?

BIDDLE: Isn't he? I don't know what a Michael should be like.

JUDY (*without looking up*): Tall, dark, and very romantic.

BIDDLE: That doesn't sound like Mr. Shuttleworth. 

A pause. Then CORNELIUS appears in doorway of Private Office, with a cigar-box in his hand. He is wearing a dark suit and a black tie, and shows signs of having had a bad time. He speaks very quietly.

CORNELIUS: Look at these, Biddle. Nearly a full box of those big

Zarranagas. Must have been at the bottom of that drawer years and years. Isn't it a shame?

BIDDLE (*going over and taking out big but ragged cigar, gravely*): It is a shame, Mr. Cornelius. These must have been expensive cigars.

CORNELIUS: Cost about half a crown each.

BIDDLE (*impressed*): Half a crown! (*Peering into box.*)

CORNELIUS: Take them, Biddle, if you think you can do anything with 'em. They look hopeless to me.

BIDDLE (*taking them*): Oh—thank you. I think if they're trimmed up a bit, they'll make a very good smoke, a very good smoke.

CORNELIUS: Then your commercial career, Biddle, ends in smoke, but in very good smoke. Lawrence, you'd better clear up some of that mess in there. Then you can go. Look, start on the table first.

They go in together.

BIDDLE (*quietly as he returns to his desk with cigars*): Mr. Murrison bought these. He liked a good cigar.

There is a tiny knock on the door, then it opens to admit the head and shoulders of MRS. READE.

MRS. READE: Oh—good evening. May I come in a minute?

Enters, but not far.

BIDDLE: Oh—good evening.

MRS. READE: I'm Mrs. Reade, y'know. The landlord, Mr. Samuel Rigby's my uncle. I've just been up to the top floor—there's a proper private flat there, y'know, we let it out—and I saw a light here and I thought I'd just—(*staring about her.*) You look as if you're going for good.

BIDDLE: We are. The landlord knows.

MRS. READE: Yes, I expect so, but he never tells me anything, even if I do keep house for him. But what I really called for—is the tall gentleman here I saw the other day at the meeting? Oh, I think he's in there, isn't he? (*Calling.*) Good evening.

CORNELIUS (*coming out of the Private Office with some things belonging to MURRISON—flask, personal diary, etc.*): Good evening. (*Puzzled a moment.*) Oh—yes—you're—

MRS. READE: Mrs. Reade, that's right. I was at the meeting here, you remember. We've been away since—my uncle had a bit of sciatica—and I've been wondering what happened after that meeting. You know, I couldn't have stayed another minute, not if you'd paid me a thousand pounds. You remember? I left, all of a sudden.

CORNELIUS (*tonelessly*): Yes, I remember.

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MRS. READE: That friend of yours—he frightened me.

CORNELIUS: I'm sorry.

MRS. READE (*confidentially*): Wasn't he—a bit mad?

CORNELIUS: Yes.

MRS. READE: I knew it. Did they—put him away?

CORNELIUS: No.

MRS. READE: Oh—what happened then?

CORNELIUS (*very gently*): He shot himself.

MRS. READE: Shot himself?

CORNELIUS: Yes. (*Showing revolver, which he is carrying with other things.*) With this.

MRS. READE (*recoiling slightly*): Oh—how awful! You must have been very upset.

CORNELIUS: He was my partner and my best friend.

MRS. READE (*curious and consolatory*): I don't suppose he knew what he was doing——

CORNELIUS: I think he did.

MRS. READE: When did this happen?

CORNELIUS: Ten days ago.

MRS. READE: Not—here?

CORNELIUS: No.

MRS. READE: Was he——?

JUDY (*jumping up with startling effect*): Oh—do stop! How can you stand there asking these idiotic questions?

MRS. READE (*indignantly*): What do you mean?

JUDY: I mean that there's been quite enough of it already. Can't you see you're hurting him—and making us all want to scream?

CORNELIUS: Judy!

JUDY: I'm sorry—but you ought to have seen it for yourself. (*Begins putting her typed sheets together, trying to calm herself.*)

CORNELIUS (*to MRS. READE, courteously*): Good night, madam.

MRS. READE (*after a final glare at JUDY*): Oh—good night!

Goes out, leaving the others rigid and silent. Then CORNELIUS puts down the things he has been carrying, and then puts away the revolver in a drawer, which must be prominently placed. The silence can be broken here by a dull sort of suppressed sob from MISS PORRIN.

CORNELIUS (*looking into Private Office*): I don't know you can really do much good there, Lawrence. It's beginning to look like a dustman's

job. You'd better clear off, I think. Biddle, you don't want Lawrence for anything, do you?

BIDDLE: Aren't there some letters going out, Mr. Cornelius? He'd better copy them.

CORNELIUS (*with some irony*): There are some letters going out, but I don't think we need copy them.

BIDDLE (*surprised*): No copies?

CORNELIUS: No copies. For once, we'll risk it. We don't know what we've said. Just gone—like that. It doesn't matter. They're good letters but they're not meant to be answered. Perhaps the best letters are never meant to be answered. They're certainly never meant to be copied. (LAWRENCE *comes out*.) Well, Lawrence, at last, you'll be able to make a fresh start in life, eh?

LAWRENCE (*shyly*): Yes, sir.

CORNELIUS (*seriously*): I'm sorry we've wasted your time. But you know we've wasted a lot of our own time too. And we haven't as much to spare as you have. What's it to be?

LAWRENCE (*with a rush of confidence*): I might have a chance of getting into a wireless shop just near us at home. My father knows the man, and he's thinking it over.

CORNELIUS: Good. You've got your reference from us?

LAWRENCE: Yes, sir. And thank you very much.

CORNELIUS: And good luck with the wireless.

LAWRENCE: Thank you, sir. I—I hope you'll be all right, sir.

CORNELIUS (*gravely*): Thank you, Lawrence. I think I shall be all right. Good-bye.

LAWRENCE (*shakily*): Good-bye, sir.

CORNELIUS *shakes hands with him, then goes into the other room.*

LAWRENCE *hastily gets into his overcoat and hat.* BIDDLE and MISS PORRIN *leave their work and come forward.*

BIDDLE: I hope I'll see you again some time, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE: I hope so too, Mr. Biddle.

BIDDLE: And just remember—that attention to work is the secret of progress.

LAWRENCE (*earnestly*): I shan't forget—not if the work's anything to do with wireless.

MISS PORRIN: Good-bye, Lawrence. We *have* been good friends, haven't we, even though we *have* had our little quarrels?

LAWRENCE (*in bluff manly tone*): Yes, Miss Porrin, of course we have. (*Shakes hands.*) Good-bye.

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MISS PORRIN: And very good luck.

LAWRENCE: Good-bye, Miss Evison.

JUDY (*standing up and smiling at him*): Good-bye, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE (*after looking at her an embarrassed second*): And—and I do think—you're awfully pretty.

Hastily wrings hand she extends, then rushes out.

JUDY (*amused*): Sweet!

She covers her typewriter, gathers up her letters and envelopes and goes into Private Office. MISS PORRIN looks up alertly and watches JUDY, then picking up an account book and a few papers, obviously as an excuse to follow her, goes out after her. Meanwhile BIDDLE closes his books and tidies up wearily, yawning, etc. Then when the girls are gone, he carefully puts on his overcoat, puts down his hat by the cigar box he is taking home, then brings out his pipe, already charged, and lights it.

CORNELIUS (*coming out from Private Office and letting the door close behind him*): Biddle—oh, are you going?

BIDDLE: Well, I was feeling a bit tired, Mr. Cornelius. But if there's anything else you want me to do to-night, I'll stay.

CORNELIUS: No, no, my dear chap, not necessary at all.

BIDDLE: I'll come down in the morning and just finish clearing up.

CORNELIUS (*sharply*): No, don't do that.

BIDDLE (*rather surprised*): Oh—all right, Mr. Cornelius. Monday then.

CORNELIUS: No, not Monday. Make it Tuesday.

BIDDLE: Tuesday?

CORNELIUS: Yes. Go away for the week-end, Biddle.

BIDDLE: But I never go away for the week-end——

CORNELIUS: Go down and see the daughter of yours² in South Devon. Then you can begin making your arrangements. What sort of business are they in?

BIDDLE: It's her husband's business. Men's outfitting—you know, socks and shirts and collars, all that kind of thing. He's got a nice little business there—the only shop of that kind in the town—and he wants to expand—buy the shop next door.

CORNELIUS: And then you'll help him to sell his socks and shirts and collars, eh?

BIDDLE: I shall have a try.

CORNELIUS: You'll have to learn how to reach up—in one swift continuous flowing movement, Biddle—for all those green and yellow

shiny cardboard boxes they have, and then spread them along the counter. "Something in this style, perhaps, sir," you'll say, "we're selling a lot of these this summer." And there they'll be—shiny cardboard boxes—socks and shirts and collars—all in a row. And you'll enjoy it. You'll enjoy every bit of it. Smoking your pipe over the plan for next season's campaign. Spending your weekly half-day holiday looking for the early primroses and violets. You'll be a chief among the elders in that part of South Devon. And you'll play such a devilish game of chess that they'll have to bring a Presbyterian minister specially from Cornwall to beat you. I've told you before, Biddle—and I'll tell you again now, for the last time—you're a lucky fellow, a very lucky fellow. •

BIDDLE (*laughing*): Sounds like it, Mr. Cornelius, when you put it that way. I'll look in on Tuesday then. Will you be here, sir? •

CORNELIUS (*quietly*): No, I shan't be here.

BIDDLE (*rather taken aback*): Oh! •

CORNELIUS: There's nothing more for me to do, is there? •

BIDDLE: No—only I didn't—I mean, are you going away?

CORNELIUS: Yes, I'm going away.

BIDDLE (*gently*): I expect you want to get away from here, Mr. Cornelius?

CORNELIUS: Yes.

BIDDLE: I know it's been a big strain—Mr. Murrison—and everything—

CORNELIUS: Yes.

BIDDLE (*quickly*): But he didn't know what he was doing, Mr. Cornelius. You mustn't think about it. He was—he was mad—and he just picked up the revolver.

CORNELIUS: No, you're wrong, Biddle. You heard what I said to that woman a few minutes ago. He knew what he was doing. He was sane then. That was the real Bob Murrison.

BIDDLE (*gravely*): I don't like to think that.

CORNELIUS: Why? He saw a chance of slipping out—quickly, decently—and he took it. That poor gibbering fool we saw wasn't Bob Murrison. But it was Bob himself who destroyed him. Came back from—from somewhere—to do it. (BIDDLE *shakes his head*.) Biddle, I've been thinking a lot about this lately. One thing puzzles me. I've never believed in this going on and on. I've always thought that when you were dead, that was the end of you. But this—suicide business—somehow doesn't fit in with that. Something inside you, we'll say, compels you to pick up a revolver, pull the trigger—

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

BIDDLE (*distressed*): Mr. Cornelius—please—don't go on. Leave it alone. Don't think about it.

CORNELIUS (*calmer now*): No, that's all right, my dear fellow. Listen. Something inside you—your will, or whatever it is—compels you to pick up a revolver, pull the trigger, and destroy yourself. But how can you destroy the whole of yourself, Biddle? That's what puzzles me.

BIDDLE: You can't.

CORNELIUS: I can understand that you could destroy a part of yourself, just as you could cut off a finger or a leg. But that something inside you that says "I've had enough of this. I'm going," *that* can't be destroyed. It must go on existing somewhere, mustn't it?

BIDDLE: Yes, Mr. Cornelius. I've been taught that all my life. That's why I say that suicide's terribly wrong—

CORNELIUS (*sharply*): No, I won't have that.

BIDDLE (*impressively*): Terribly wrong.

CORNELIUS: I tell you, that's all eyewash. We like to pretend that suicides are cowards when all the time we know damned well they're not. We condemn them because they walk out while we still stay fiddling and frigging behind. They annoy us because they call our bluff.

BIDDLE (*sharply*): No.

CORNELIUS: Yes. They won't have life on any terms. We will—like those people who because they've paid for a meal will eat any muck. We linger on and on in the bit of light that's left—calling it *sticking it*—when all the time we're simply frightened of the jump into the dark.

BIDDLE: No, Mr. Cornelius. You're a cleverer man than I am. But you're all wrong about this. You're not thinking straight.

CORNELIUS: I'm trying to, Biddle.

BIDDLE: If you'll excuse me saying so, you're talking like a man who's tired and a bit sick. After all, who are we to say what life is and what it's worth?

CORNELIUS: We know what it's offered us.

BIDDLE: We know the bit we've taken, that's all. *You* ought to realise that, Mr. Cornelius.

CORNELIUS: Why *me* specially, Biddle?

BIDDLE: Well, sir, you've always seemed to me to be interested in all kinds of things—

CORNELIUS (*ruefully*): At a distance.

BIDDLE: Is it good-bye for the present then, Mr. Cornelius?

CORNELIUS: I think it is.

MISS PORRIN *comes in from the Private Office and shuts the door behind her. She stands just inside quietly. The other two ignore her.* You're a lucky fellow, but you deserve to be. Good-bye, Biddle. *(Shaking hands.)*

BIDDLE: Good-bye, Mr. Cornelius. Good night, Miss Porrin.

He goes. CORNELIUS remains silent for a moment, still looking at the door. MISS PORRIN approaches.

CORNELIUS: Now then, Miss Porrin, time you were off, isn't it?

MISS PORRIN *(timidly)*: Mr. Cornelius—I should like to tell you how—how happy I've been here working with you.

CORNELIUS *(rather surprised, but gently)*: Have you?

MISS PORRIN *(eagerly)*: Oh yes. The two offices I worked in before this, I didn't like at all, but I've been really happy here—with you.

CORNELIUS: That's fine, Miss Porrin.

MISS PORRIN: And I know I'll never feel like this about any other place—

CORNELIUS *(rather brusquely)*: Of course you will. Feel much better. Enormous offices, all glass and metal and light, open at ten and closing at four. That's what you'll have soon, Miss Porrin. Much better than this. Can't compare them.

MISS PORRIN: No. It'll never be the same. And if you're going to stay here I'd like to stay on too—to help you.

CORNELIUS: Very good of you, but really, there's nothing you can do. I've practically finished now.

She looks at him beseechingly and timidly puts a finger on his arm.

MISS PORRIN: If you have finished—if you are going now—I wondered—if you'd like to talk to me.

CORNELIUS *(bewildered)*: Talk to you?

MISS PORRIN *(eagerly)*: Yes, couldn't we go somewhere—to eat and drink and talk—I mean, I feel you're so lonely now, and I am too—and we'd have so much to talk about—wouldn't we?—having been here together so long. And I'm so sorry about everything. Please, couldn't we? *(As he gently releases himself and shakes his head)* Or, if you didn't want to talk, we could just sit quietly somewhere. I wouldn't mind. I'd like it. Couldn't we?

CORNELIUS *(gently)*: I'm afraid we couldn't, though it's nice of you to suggest it, very nice. But—

MISS PORRIN *(trying to hide her distress)*: No, it doesn't matter. You needn't try to explain.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

CORNELIUS: I was only going to say that I've still some things to do here. Some of them are rather—important. I'm sorry.

MISS PORRIN (*going towards telephone*): It doesn't matter.

CORNELIUS: Good-bye, Miss Porrin.

MISS PORRIN (*her back to him, muffled*): Good-bye.

He looks at her a moment. She is now dialling a number and trying to control herself. He goes into the Private Office, closing door behind him. She is now quietly crying.

MISS PORRIN (*quietly, trying to control her voice, into telephone*): Is that you, Rose? Miss Porrin. Just—just tell them I shan't be staying out—after all. No, it's nothing. I've got—I've got a headache. No, nothing to eat, just some tea— (*JUDY comes out, closing door behind her and goes across to her table.*) I'll be going straight to bed. (*Puts down receiver, dabs at her face and is not able to stifle a choking sob.*)

JUDY looks at her curiously as MISS PORRIN slowly goes to put her things on.

JUDY (*quietly*): What's the matter?

MISS PORRIN (*putting on things*): Nothing.

JUDY gets her own things out and puts her coat on, but places her hat and gloves, etc., on the table. MISS PORRIN comes nearer and stares at her fixedly.

JUDY (*smiling, but not unkindly*): Well?

MISS PORRIN (*in low tense voice*): I wish I didn't hate you so much. I've never hated anybody like this before.

JUDY: And you've no right to hate me. What have I done?

MISS PORRIN: Lots of things.

JUDY: What things?

MISS PORRIN: That isn't it.

JUDY: Please tell me why. I don't hate you. I don't hate anybody. As a matter of fact, I don't even dislike you, although you've been unfriendly to me ever since I came here. I've been—rather sorry for you.

MISS PORRIN: Why should you be sorry for me? You're only a child yet, a silly child. You don't really know anything.

JUDY: That's stupid you know, Miss Porrin. I may be years younger than you, but I'm not a child. I believe I'm more a grown-up person than you are.

MISS PORRIN (*wildly*): Because you're young and pretty now—you think it's going to be always like this. It isn't—(*breaking down*)—it isn't, it isn't.

JUDY (*distressed, trying to console her*): Miss Porrin, don't—don't please.

MISS PORRIN (*clutching, urgently*): Listen, forget what I said. That doesn't matter now. Only one thing does matter. He mustn't be so quiet, so unhappy. I'm frightened. He oughtn't to be like that. Stay with him if he wants you to. You see, I ask you to, I don't care what I say now. I'm thinking about him. He's a man. He's different. Please——

The Private Office door opens and CORNELIUS is seen standing there. MISS PORRIN gives him one look, then hurries out. JUDY and CORNELIUS stand perfectly still until there is heard the sound of a distant door slamming. Then CORNELIUS turns back to switch off the Private Office light, after which he comes in and closes the door quietly behind him. Meanwhile JUDY has hastily gone to the window, pulled away the blind and tried to look down into the street. She comes away and looks at CORNELIUS as he approaches.

CORNELIUS (*awkwardly*): I suppose you ought to go now.

JUDY: Yes. (*A pause.*)

CORNELIUS: How old are you?

JUDY (*smiling*): Must you know?

CORNELIUS (*hastily*): No, no. What does it matter? Whatever it is, I'm twice it. You think of a number and I double it.

JUDY (*smiling*): And then I shall take away the number I first thought of—and myself with it.

CORNELIUS: What do you do when you're at home?

JUDY: Oh!—read—sew a bit, not much—listen to the wireless. The usual things. Quite commonplace.

CORNELIUS (*staring at her, musingly*): Perhaps you are quite commonplace—really.

JUDY (*promptly*): No, I'm not. I'm *really* rather special.

CORNELIUS (*absently*): Yes?

JUDY (*indecisively*): I think I ought to go.

CORNELIUS: No, please, don't go. You've plenty of time. You've no idea how much time you have—years and years and years.

JUDY (*laughing*): Not to-night, I haven't. Somebody's waiting for me. (*She leans against the table.*)

CORNELIUS (*making conversation*): Have you liked it here?

JUDY: Parts of it.

CORNELIUS: Biddle's a nice fellow, isn't he?

JUDY: Yes. I like Mr. Biddle.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

CORNELIUS (*lamely*): Very good chap.

JUDY (*with mock official manner*): And—is that all, Mr. Cornelius?

CORNELIUS: No, it isn't all. It isn't any. It's nothing. I haven't begun to talk yet. I don't know how to begin. Something happened that very first morning you came here. It's not long ago—

JUDY: A fortnight last Monday, to be exact.

CORNELIUS: Not much happened then, perhaps. But afterwards—only a day or two—just before we had the meeting here—and I came in and you were singing.

JUDY: I remember. You were very nice about that.

CORNELIUS (*almost to himself*): It's as if it's been dark here ever since then—and you carried a little light with you. When you came in, it wasn't so dark. There was a light round your head. And the song has never stopped. It's a long time since I felt like this, a long long time. That's why I can't tell you properly. It's—it's a good record but the gramophone's old and rusty. I'm sorry.

JUDY (*putting out a hand*): I'm sorry too.

CORNELIUS (*eagerly*): Are you? How small and clear you are—like the flame of a candle! (*Pauses, then laughs shortly and harshly.*)

JUDY: What does that mean?

CORNELIUS: I was thinking—here's the good old situation they're so fond of in the magazine stories and the comic papers. The business man keeps the typist in the office after hours to make love to her.

JUDY (*sharply*): No. I know it's not like that at all.

CORNELIUS (*harshly*): But it is. I'm a business man—or I was. You're a typist. This is an office. And it's late. And I'm making love to you.

JUDY: You're not. Not in that way.

CORNELIUS: Yes, I am. In that way, in every way.

JUDY: Oh—why do you say that? Can't you see you're spoiling everything?

CORNELIUS (*wonderingly*): Am I?

JUDY: Yes. Please stop. You're only hurting yourself.

CORNELIUS: That's nothing. Tell me what a fool I am—now, after all this time—to fall in love again, like a boy. Yes, like a boy.

JUDY: You can't expect me to tell you that.

CORNELIUS (*eagerly*): Can't I? (*Catches her hands as she smiles and shakes her head.*) Why Judy then—little Judy—is this real? (*He tries to kiss her but deliberately she turns her face away so that his kiss falls lamely on her cheek. He withdraws, bewildered and disappointed.*) Oh!

JUDY (*distressed*): I'm sorry. I ought to have told you. It isn't that I don't like you. I do. But—you see—I'm in love with somebody too.

CORNELIUS: I see.

JUDY: He's outside now—waiting for me. That's why—I couldn't, you see.

CORNELIUS: And you're in love with him?

JUDY: Yes. I know I ought to have told you at once. It wasn't fair to you.

To her astonishment, he suddenly laughs, not without bitterness, but still—a genuine laugh.

CORNELIUS: *It wasn't fair to me!* I said I was behaving like a boy, and now that very phrase takes me back thirty years. Technical College boys and High School girls, parties and sets of lancers, and somebody saying "It wasn't fair of you, Alice, not to tell Tom you were going with Frank." My God, I've asked for it, I've got it. (*Laughs again.*)

JUDY (*annoyed*): I think I'd better go. I stayed—and listened—because I liked you and I was sorry.

CORNELIUS (*not unkindly*): No other reason?

JUDY: Yes. Because I'm a girl, and I knew what you were feeling, and I wanted to hear what you'd say to me. Any girl would.

CORNELIUS: That's honest of you.

JUDY: I am honest. More honest than you are.

CORNELIUS: Oh?

JUDY (*with force*): Yes. If you meant what you said to me a few minutes ago, you shouldn't pretend now—because it's all no use—that you weren't serious. That's cowardly and hateful.

CORNELIUS (*gravely*): My dear, it isn't so simple as that. I've been as honest as possible with you all the time. It's too late for anything else. And if I offended you a moment ago, I'm sorry, Judy.

JUDY (*smiling at him*): All right. And I'm sorry too.

CORNELIUS: There's one thing I'd like you to do for me. If this young man of yours is waiting outside, I wish you'd call him in for a moment.

JUDY (*rather puzzled*): You'd like to see him?

CORNELIUS: Yes. After all, that's not much to ask, is it?

JUDY (*hesitating*): No—only—all right, I'll see if he's out there.

She pulls the blind away, goes behind it, and can be heard giving a singing call down into the street below. Then she cries "Eric, come up here," waits a moment, then returns to CORNELIUS.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

CORNELIUS: And you're in love with him?

JUDY: Yes.

CORNELIUS: He's a very lucky young man. And he's in love with you?

JUDY: Yes. We adore one another. We want to get married as soon as he's settled down in his present job. I'm longing to be married. I'd hate to go on years and years, working in offices—like poor Miss Porrin.

CORNELIUS: I'm afraid Miss Porrin didn't like you.

JUDY: Of course not. She was jealous—poor thing.

CORNELIUS: And now it's my turn—poor thing.

JUDY: You don't sound very jealous.

CORNELIUS: I don't think I am. Rather sad perhaps. And very curious.

JUDY: I don't like that.

CORNELIUS: I shall never see you again. You must let me spend a minute or two guessing what the rest of your life's going to be like. And I think I hear it coming.

They both turn to the door, expectantly. There is a tap, then ERIC SHEFFORD enters. He is wearing an overcoat and a spotted silk muffler, and carries his hat. He stops when he sees CORNELIUS.

JUDY: Hello, Eric. Come in. Mr. Cornelius wanted to meet you. This is Eric Shefford.

CORNELIUS (*almost involuntarily*): My God, it's the twister.

JUDY: The what?

ERIC (*sulkily*): All right. I didn't come here to be insulted.

CORNELIUS: We know that. Nobody goes anywhere to be insulted.

JUDY: But do you know one another?

CORNELIUS (*dryly*): Only slightly. A business acquaintance.

JUDY: But why didn't you tell me, Eric?

ERIC: It wasn't of any importance. I'd only called here twice.

CORNELIUS: That's all. We did a little business together, and then somehow I quarrelled with his company, the Excelsior Transport, whose banner has a strange device.

ERIC: I didn't know you were here, else I wouldn't have come in.

JUDY: I want to know what happened.

CORNELIUS: It doesn't matter. He'll tell you some time.

JUDY: What did you call him?

ERIC: He called me a twister, if you must know, Judy.

ACT III

CORNELIUS

JUDY (*from one to the other*): Why?

CORNELIUS: Never mind now. That's all over.

JUDY (*to ERIC*): Why?

ERIC (*quickly, rather desperately*): He thinks I deliberately misled him about some rates I quoted, and got the business under false pretences.

JUDY: And did you? (*ERIC is silent.*) Eric!

ERIC: Yes, I suppose I did. Though I didn't do anything illegal. But I'd got to get some business, to keep the job. You know what it was like, I told you, Judy. I was desperate. I'm sorry, Mr. Cornelius, but you don't understand what it's like trying to keep a job like that. The competition's terrible. I know I was wrong——

CORNELIUS: All right, all right. It's done with now.

JUDY: Is it?

ERIC: But Judy, you can't blame me. I was doing it for your sake. And you know what a time I'd had before.

JUDY: Yes, I know, Eric.

ERIC: I'm sorry I didn't tell you before. Are you coming along now?

JUDY (*hesitating*): Just a minute, Eric, please.

ERIC: Oh—all right—but I've been hanging about down there——

JUDY: I know. I'm sorry. But please wait outside, I shan't be two minutes. (*He goes. They wait a moment. JUDY faces CORNELIUS.*) Now tell me what you're thinking. (*He shakes his head.*) I'm not afraid. You can say what you like. It won't make any difference to me. I know him. You don't—really.

CORNELIUS: No, of course I don't, my dear.

JUDY: I know he can be very stupid, very weak, sometimes. I know we may have all kinds of trouble.

CORNELIUS (*gravely*): I think you may.

JUDY: But it can't be helped. You see, I love him.

CORNELIUS: Yes, I see.

JUDY: You think I'm very young and silly now, don't you? But I'm not. I know my life with Eric isn't going to be easy, I know it far better than you do. But it's my life. I wouldn't run away from it. Even though you're a girl—and a girl in love—you need courage, a special sort of courage, if you're going to live properly. My sister Ann has it. I have it too.

CORNELIUS: Yes, you have. I'll wish you luck. And do it properly.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

(*Picking up MURRISON's flask.*) See. I'll drink your health. His too, if you like.

JUDY: I don't understand you.

CORNELIUS: That's as it should be. Otherwise I'd have lived these extra five-and-twenty years of mine for nothing. A solemn toast. (*In manner of toastmaster.*) My lords, ladies and gentlemen, see that your glasses are charged, and pray silence for your chairman, the Wrong Dishonourable James Frederick Cornelius, Knight of the Ancient Order of Near Bankrupts. (JUDY *laughs. Then his manner suddenly changes.*) May you always be brave and happy, Judy, always be as clear and beautiful as the flame of a candle. (*He drinks. Then he sits down at the table, and she stands facing him and the window, very clearly seen.*) No, don't move. Don't speak.

JUDY (*softly, uncertainly*): I wouldn't find it easy—if I wanted to.

She stands motionless, he sits with his head in his hands looking at her for a moment.

CORNELIUS (*very quietly, without raising his head*): Thank you, Judy. Good-bye.

JUDY: Good-bye.

Then very swiftly she moves to the table, flings her arms about his neck, kisses him, rests her cheek against his for a second, then as he automatically goes back in surprise, snatches up her hat and gloves and hurries out, with a small choked cry. Very slowly after staring at the door he rises. He gives a glance at the window, then moves like a man in a dream. He holds up the flask so that he can see a reflection of himself in the silver base of it.

CORNELIUS (*quietly to his reflection*): You silly old fool!

Then he goes to a drawer, takes some paper, sits down and begins writing. Then the door is opened, and MRS. ROBERTS enters. She is rather breathless.

CORNELIUS: What is it?

MRS. ROBERTS: I just called to see if Mr. Biddle had left me my week's money in my envelope, and to pick up one or two of my bits o' cleaning things. (*She goes over to BIDDLE's desk for the envelope, and afterwards collects cleaning things, in a black cloth bag from the cupboard.*) All packing up, eh?

CORNELIUS: Yes, finished.

MRS. ROBERTS: What happened to you then? Did you go bankrupt, or what?

CORNELIUS: We came to a private agreement with our creditors.

MRS. ROBERTS: Well, I wish to God I could come to one with mine. Are you going away?

CORNELIUS: Yes.

MRS. ROBERTS: I wish I could get away.

CORNELIUS: Where would you go to?

MRS. ROBERTS: I've always had a fancy for Eastbourne.

CORNELIUS: I don't think you'd like it.

MRS. ROBERTS: If I could only have my feet up most o' the morning and afternoon and no cleaning and have a nice tea on a fancy tray, then go out and see a bit o' life in the evening, anywhere would do me.

CORNELIUS (*reflectively*): I suppose women are really tougher than men.

MRS. ROBERTS: I should think they are! If women was as soft as men, when a bit o' trouble came—there'd be nothing here, but a graveyard soon.

CORNELIUS: It isn't much else here now. Millions of people and none of them real and those that are real are mostly in graveyards.

MRS. ROBERTS: Come, come, Mr. Cornelius, I'm not worrying and I can give you a year or two.

CORNELIUS: You can't. That's the trouble. Nobody can. And I want a few. I've wasted so many.

MRS. ROBERTS: Where?

CORNELIUS: Here, among other places.

MRS. ROBERTS (*indignantly*): Why, you're not going to start grumbling now—are you?—just because you've spent a few years sitting here in a nice office, with other people waiting on you, and three good meals a day and anything else you liked? Gertcha—you don't know you're born.

CORNELIUS: But I do. That's the point. I think a lot of people don't, and it's a bit of luck for them. I know I'm born—when it's too late.

MRS. ROBERTS: Well, my motto is, it's never too late. You look after yourself, Mr. Cornelius. (*Moves towards door.*) Good night.

CORNELIUS: Good night.

She looks at him for a moment, troubled, then goes out. CORNELIUS gets up, takes the revolver from the drawer. He goes to the main door, locks it and throws the key away, switches off the light and goes over to the window and idly opens it. Through the window come street noises, then gradually the sound of a banjo being played in the pub below. His face lights up as he listens. Suddenly he becomes decisive, and says loudly and clearly "No." He flings away the revolver.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

CORNELIUS: After a week in the Indian village—— (*he picks up a big ledger, speaking—though jerkily—all the time, and with gathering force*)—we decided to take the track into the clouds—to find—among those heights—— (*he hurls the ledger with such force that the door is smashed clean open, so that he can walk through, repeating triumphantly*)—the lost city of the Incas.

END OF PLAY

PEOPLE AT SEA

A Play in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

FRANK JEFFERSON, Fourth Officer of the *Zillah*
RIPTON, a steward
MILES, Second Wireless Officer of the *Zillah*
NONA STOCKTON, a young American passenger
PROFESSOR PAWLET, an elderly English passenger
ASHFORD MYRICKS, a middle-aged American passenger
MRS. WESTMORELAND, an elderly English passenger
CARLO VELBURG, a Central European super-cargo
BOYNE, a deck-hand
MIRIAM PICK, Diana Lismore's personal maid
VALENTINE AVON, a well-known English author
DIANA LISMORE, a well-known English actress

ACT I

Morning

ACT II

SCENE I. Evening of the following day

SCENE II. Later that night

ACT III

Two hours later

All the action of the play takes place in the Veranda Café of SS. *Zillah*, a ship of about 10,000 tons carrying passengers and cargo to Central America.

People at Sea—Copyright, 1950, by J. B. Priestley

*“People at Sea” was first produced in London at the Apollo Theatre,
on Wednesday, November 24th, 1937, with the following cast:*

FRANK JEFFERSON	ANDREW LAURENCE
RIPTON	FREDERICK PIPER
MILES	NEVILLE MAPP
NONA STOCKTON	CARLA LEHMANN
• PROFESSOR PAWLET	EDWARD CHAPMAN
• ASHFORD MYRICKS	MACDONALD PARKE
MRS. WESTMORELAND	MARJORIE FIELDING
CARLO VELBURG	CARL JAFFE
BOYNE	TORIN THATCHER
MIRIAM PICK	VIVIENNE BENNETT
VALENTINE AVON	MARTIN WALKER
DIANA LISMORE	JEAN MUIR

The play produced by AURIOL LEE

ACT I

Veranda Café of SS. ZILLAH, a ship of about 10,000 tons carrying both passengers and cargo and built for the tropics. A double-glass door at back leads to deck, and there is a door, panelled wood, at each side, well down stage. Between these and the main entrance at back are recesses fitted with tables and lounge seats fixed to wall. In the centre can be another fixed table with fixed chairs round it. The place is brightly decorated in a modern style. Against one wall, downstage, there is a large notice-board with various notices on it. If possible, the whole set should be designed and built slightly askew, to suggest that the ship has a list on her. Through glass doors at back we can see the deck. The railings should look as if they have been removed and then hurriedly put back, being not properly set. There should also be some suggestion of confusion and fire, a few blackened buckets, charred ropes, etc. Beyond there is a glimpse of a blue sea and sky. At rise the stage is empty and should remain so for a few moments, during which the noise of the sea slapping and hissing against the sides can be heard. Then FRANK JEFFERSON, Fourth Officer of the ship, enters from back. He is a pleasant-looking, manly fellow about twenty-eight, but at the moment looks extremely dirty—his white uniform being blackened and burnt—and almost completely exhausted. He leans against a table a moment, relaxing and mopping his face, then with an effort goes to door right, and calls.

FRANK: Ripton. Ripton. Bring it into the veranda café. Look sloppy—for the love of Pete!

RIPTON (*off*): Just coming.

Enter RIPTON, carrying cup of hot coffee and thick sandwich. He is a ratty little Cockney steward, about forty-five, in a uniform soiled like FRANK'S.

RIPTON: Here y'are, Mr. Jefferson. Don't know what it'll taste like but it's hot and wet. 'Am sangwich too.

FRANK: Thanks, Ripton. How did you manage to make the coffee?

RIPTON: Found a primus in the smoke-room pantry. S'all we've got till we can get below.

FRANK: We can get down for stores all right now. But you can't stay down. Hot as hell. Anybody else in the smoke-room pantry?

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

RIPTON: Yes. That American. Big chap, they said was a millionaire.

FRANK: Mr. Ashford Myricks?

RIPTON: That's him.

FRANK: What's he doing there?

RIPTON: Cooking.

FRANK (*surprised*): Cooking?

RIPTON: In his shirt and trousers, with a frying-pan on that primus, singing "Dinah from Carolina," an' sweating like a bull. Says if the ship won't cook him, he's going to cook for the ship. Says if he's not allowed to cook, he won't play ball. I 'don't know what he's talking about—these Americans sound barmy 'alf the time to me—but that's what he says. If I can't cook, I won't play ball.

FRANK: All right. Let him cook. Ask Mr. Miles to come down here. And take down a signal.

RIPTON: Is he sending, Mr. Jefferson?

FRANK: I don't know. Shouldn't think so.

RIPTON: Are we all right now, Mr. Jefferson, d'you think?

FRANK: We ought to be—unless we run into another sea. A big sea would put us under in an hour.

RIPTON: This is a nice life, isn't it? One night you're goin' to be burnt to death, and next night you're going to be ruddy well drowned.

FRANK: Well, you ought to have stayed down the Old Kent Road, Ripton.

RIPTON: I don't know anything about the Old Kent Road. I come from Walthamstow, and if I'd had any sense I'd have stayed there. But they'll have to pay me compensation.

FRANK: You wait till you're out of it first before you start talking about "compensation". You remember those big sharks we fish for off Colon——

RIPTON: 'Ere, Mr. Jefferson, for Gawd's sake!

FRANK: Come on, ask Sparks to come down.

RIPTON *gives him a reproachful glance, then goes out left.*
FRANK *continues eating and drinking. Then he goes to door at back and looks out anxiously for a moment, then returns to finish his drink and sandwich.* WALTER MILES *enters left. He is a weedy-looking fellow about thirty, with a thin Cockney voice. He is weary and unkempt. He has paper and pencil with him.* RIPTON *follows him and exits door right.*

MILES (*rather hopelessly*): I'm trying to rig up a temporary set, just for sending. It's your only chance. But we haven't got it fixed yet.

• FRANK: Who's the we?

MILES: That chap Velburg's giving me a hand. He knows a bit about wireless and he offered to help. We ought to get something rigged up before to-night. Got a cigarette?

FRANK *offers him case and he lights up.*

FRANK (*taking pencil and pencil*): I thought you'd have been ready to send now.

MILES: Oh—for God's sake—give me a chance—I can't work miracles, can I?

FRANK: All right, Sparks, I didn't say you could. Take it easy.

MILES: It's all very well saying "Take it easy" but what with one thing and another I'm just about all in. With Wilson going sick, I've hardly been out of that wireless room since we left Colon. I've had no proper sleep. When I try to sleep, I can't.

FRANK: Try a hefty drink and then have a nap. You'll feel better when you wake up. Don't forget we're depending on you, Sparks. I thought I'd better have a message ready for you when you can send again. (*He begins writing, while MILES leans on table and overlooks the paper.*) Steamship *Zillah*. Colon to London. Fire in holds One and Two. Order given to abandon ship evening of 14th. All boats got away safely except the last, owing to sudden squall and faulty condition of said boat——

MILES: Just stuck together with paint, that's all. Let me get out of this, and I'll tell 'em something. Boats!——

FRANK: All right. Save it till you're home. (*Continuing his report.*) Captain Erikson swept overboard, presumably drowned. Two passengers and seven crew missing. Have you all their names?

MILES: Yes.

FRANK: Remainder of boat's company compelled to remain on ship. Fire out——

MILES: Is it?

FRANK: Near enough, I think. But we can't get into the fore holds yet. (*Writes again.*) Ship now derelict. No power and steering impossible. Many plates buckled and bad starboard list, but still seaworthy in good weather.

MILES: What if it isn't good weather?

FRANK: She'll go to bits. Approximate position—latitude fifteen North—longitude seventy-two West. Frank Jefferson, fourth officer, in command. The only command he ever looks like getting too. Following passengers still aboard. Professor What's-it—Pawlet——

MILES: Here I'd better write them down too. I'll never read your

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writing. (*Takes a piece of paper, finds pencil and writes.*) Professor Pawlet.

FRANK: Ashford Myricks and his niece Nona Stockton.

MILES: Nona Stockton. That's the good-looking little piece? That's the one I want.

FRANK: That's the one you don't get. Then the cheery old girl—Mrs. Westmoreland.

MILES: Mrs. Westmoreland. Don't remember her.

FRANK: You wouldn't. You only remember 'em if they're young. Then there's that dark, sinister-looking wench—Miss Pick.

MILES: I know. She came up to the wireless room once or twice. Hot stuff, if you ask me.

FRANK: I'm not asking you. That's five. The other's that lame chap who writes books—Valentine Avon.

MILES: I know. Tight all the time.

FRANK: Tight or not tight, he's been very useful. Then there's this Velburg, and you and me, Ripton, and one deck-hand—Boyne. That seems to be the lot—eleven. Want the list?

MILES: No. I want something to eat.

FRANK: Try the smoke-room pantry. We can get down to some of the stores and we're all right for fresh water. So it might be worse.

MILES: Unless the sea starts pounding us.

FRANK: Or the fire breaks out again. Can't guarantee it won't.

MILES: What's our chance, Jefferson? Honestly?

FRANK: Can't give you the odds. But the minute you start sending, you tip them up. So keep at it, Sparks. Let's see—you married?

MILES: Not likely—on what I make out of this ruddy job. You're not, are you?

FRANK: No. Couldn't afford the ring—even. There's nobody depending on me.

MILES (*at door, gloomily*): There's somebody depending on *me*.

FRANK: Too bad. Who is it?

MILES: Me.

Goes out. FRANK looks at the paper in a vague tired way, yawns, shakes his head, yawns again, and involuntarily closes his eyes. In a moment he is dozing. NONA STOCKTON, a pretty American girl about twenty, is seen outside, looks in, sees FRANK, and enters. She comes up and sees he is asleep and stands looking at him a moment, smiling. He slowly opens his eyes.

NONA: 'Morning!

FRANK: 'Morning!

NONA: Gosh! you look as if you've been working.

FRANK: I have. Meant to turn in for an hour.

Begins struggling to get up.

NONA: Now don't try to get up. Just relax. You've never stopped since the hooter went last night and we all ran round in circles, and now you've put the fire out and everything. It's about time I did something, but I don't know what. Have you seen my uncle?

FRANK: He's in the smoke-room pantry—cooking.

NONA (*delighted*): I always said Uncle Ashford had it in him. If he can cook, so can I. I don't mean fudge and waffles either. Real honest-to-God *cooking*. (*Pauses, looking earnestly at FRANK.*) I've got the biggest bottle of eau-de-Cologne just doing nothing, Mr. Jefferson. You wouldn't like me to wash you with it, would you?

FRANK: Good lord, no!

NONA: All right, all right. But let me tell you, you've just got to stop being the gallant British officer and gentleman or I'm going to throw things at you. And don't try to keep me as the delicate young lady passenger, because I won't stand for it. I'm just one of the gang from now on. See! (*Seizes him by the arm. He winces. She lets go and looks at him and then at his arm.*) Why did you do that?

FRANK: Sorry. Arm's singed a bit.

NONA: What's your name?

FRANK: Jefferson.

NONA: But your first name.

FRANK: Frank.

NONA: You're a change from the last Frank I knew. He crooned in a fraternity house band, and wore blue suede shoes, and fell for himself all over again every morning. How do you like Nona—the name, I mean?

FRANK: I don't know. Never heard it before.

NONA: I think it's terrible, but I'm too proud to change it. Well, Frank, I'm going to do something to that arm.

FRANK: Thanks, but it's quite all right.

NONA: If I'm a pest—say so.

FRANK: You're not. In fact—— (*Hesitates.*)

NONA: Go on, say it.

FRANK: Well, I think you're a grand kid. But mind you, I'm so tired I hardly know what I'm saying.

NONA: All right. I won't hold it against you. (*Sees PROFESSOR*

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PAWLET *outside.*) Here's the Professor. Let's keep on the move or he'll nail us here for hours.

The PROFESSOR has time to enter, however. He is a man about sixty, with a thoughtful and humorous face. He is dressed incongruously in odds and ends of costume. He is smoking his pipe comfortably.

PROFESSOR (*cheerfully*): Good morning, my dear! Ah, Mr. Jefferson, I wanted to see you.

NONA (*taking FRANK with her towards back*): I hate to, but we have to leave you, Professor. He's burned his arm and I'm going to slap cold cream all over him.

PROFESSOR: You see, Mr. Jefferson—the fruits of command. Beautiful damsels dedicating their cold cream to your service. (*Sighs.*) I ought to have been a man of action.

FRANK: It isn't too late, sir.

NONA: Come on.

She leads him out at back. PROFESSOR comes down, smoking happily, then notices list of survivors that FRANK has left on table. He is considering this when ASHFORD MYRICKS enters right. He is a large middle-aged American of a type familiar as the heads of prosperous businesses—very clean, spectacled, solemn in manner but with a shrewd humorous mind. He is wearing a cook's apron.

MYRICKS (*with solemn anxiety*): Professor!

PROFESSOR: Yes, Mr. Myricks?

MYRICKS: How were those fried eggs?

PROFESSOR: Oh! excellent, excellent!

MYRICKS: Now, Professor, I don't want compliments, I want real criticism. Bring that mind of yours to bear on the question. How were those eggs?

PROFESSOR: The only flaw I remember was that one of them had been done too quickly and was—you know—rather hard and brown underneath.

MYRICKS: Thank you, Professor. That's what I wanted. Trouble is that primus is too darned fierce for easy frying. I'm considering right now some browned hash—and then maybe—a stoo. Yes, *sir*. (*Indicating paper PROFESSOR is holding.*) Have you been putting some profound observations down on paper, Professor?

PROFESSOR: No. First, I haven't any profound observations. Secondly, if I had, I wouldn't write them down at this moment. No, this seems to be a list of the members of our little community, Mr. Myricks. If we survive—we shall form a little society of our own.

We can experiment in social organisation. You've settled your own problem yourself by dropping your function as a financier—probably dubious at any time, if you'll allow me to say so—and turning yourself into that most necessary member of any community—the cook.

MYRICKS: I went on a camping and hunting trip in the mountains one time, Professor, and I hurt my leg so I couldn't move far. So I learned how to cook—biscuits and steaks and ham and eggs and coffee—from a guide we had, Old Pete, and I've been looking for a chance to cook ever since, I guess.

PROFESSOR: You're a very rich man, aren't you, Mr. Myricks?

MYRICKS: I was. Then again I wasn't. Whether I'm rich now or broke depends on what's happened to United Utilities stock.

PROFESSOR: You don't know?

MYRICKS: I don't. For the last twelve hours the ether must be getting jammed with messages for me from those boys in Wall Street—*Buy—Sell—Hold on—Ask For More Collateral—Oh Boy, We've Made It—All Over, Shoot Yourself.* And here I am, and for the first time for over thirty years, I don't give a darn. No, sir. I'm busy cooking eggs, not balance sheets.

PROFESSOR: I congratulate you. We don't want balance sheets here. Though whether afterwards you ought to stay a cook or go back to finance is a question that can't be settled in a hurry. Meanwhile, I see no use in our little community for a professor of philosophy.

MYRICKS: I don't know about a professor, but there's always use for a philosopher, I guess. Plato would tell you to take charge.

PROFESSOR: True, but he was one of us. We have our little disagreements, but we stick together in the long run, like good trade unionists, we philosophers. (MRS. WESTMORELAND *appears outside. She is a brisk, sensible upper-class Englishwoman in her sixties. The PROFESSOR does not see her and goes on.*) But I didn't imagine you were acquainted with Plato's *Republic*, Mr. Myricks.

MYRICKS: I've had a look at it as one of the acknowledged high spots of the human intellect— (*Breaks off, as MRS. WESTMORELAND enters.*) Good morning, Mrs. Westmoreland.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Good morning, Mr. Myricks. Good morning, Professor Pawlet.

PROFESSOR: And a very nice morning too.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Yes, it's still quite pleasant to be alive, isn't it?

MYRICKS: Have you had breakfast?

MRS. WESTMORELAND: No, I never take breakfast, thank you.

MYRICKS: Then I'll see you have something special later on.

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MRS. WESTMORELAND: That will be very nice. I was thinking last night, when it all seemed rather hopeless, that it didn't very much matter—though of course I hated the look of that black water—because anyhow I can only expect a few more years and at least I'd be saved a lot of tiresome expensive illnesses, with everybody standing round, trying to be sympathetic but wondering all the time how much longer the silly old thing could hold out. But now that I'm still alive—and the sun's shining again—I find I'm glad. What do you think, Professor Pawlet?

PROFESSOR (*with the air of a man about to talk at length*): For nearly forty years I have been considering the nature of reality. . . .

MYRICKS (*cutting in, solemnly*): Professor, don't forget what you're going to tell Mrs. Westmoreland, because I don't want to miss a word of it. • But right now I must go back to my pantry. Now don't forget, tell me later.

MYRICKS *goes out right*. PROFESSOR *stares after him*. MRS. WESTMORELAND *smiles*.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: You were saying?

PROFESSOR: For nearly forty years I have been considering the nature of reality. Now there is a school of philosophy, influenced by Oriental mysticism, which has told us that what we consider ordinary reality—the movement of our physical selves in the physical world—is hardly more than an illusion, a kind of long dream. I always have a special contempt for that sort of philosophy. Yet last night, when every step we took should have been intensely real, when we were face to face with the great reality of Death, everything seemed to be part of an illusion, seemed to me essentially dream-like, as if we were actors in a scene hastily contrived for us. Very curious.

MRS. WESTMORELAND (*rather dryly*): Very. Perhaps you've been allowed to live to learn a little more. (*She looks at the notices on the board*.) Bridge Tournament! That seems very far away now, doesn't it? Pity too, because my partner and I were doing very well, though the man kept grossly over-calling. It was a Mr. Madares—a fat, buttery sort of man, from Brazil. I hope he's all right in his little boat. He has four enchanting daughters. He showed me their photographs. Ravishing creatures, though probably they'll be soon fat and buttery, too. Much prettier than my girls, but they won't wear anything like so well. That's the tragedy of Englishwomen, Professor Pawlet.

PROFESSOR: What is?

MRS. WESTMORELAND: We begin to improve just when Englishmen *stop* taking any notice of us. (*Turning and seeing VELBURG entering*.) Now—who is this?

CARLO VELBURG *is in his late twenties, fair Austrian in type and a not unattractive fellow. But there is something embittered, tragic in his face and manner. He is very shabbily dressed. He speaks English with a German accent.*

VELBURG: I am looking for Mr. Miles, the wireless officer—please.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I haven't seen him this morning. Now—I don't remember you among the passengers and you don't look like one of the crew. Tell me—who are you?

VELBURG: I am not'ing.

PROFESSOR: Did you say you were nothing? Ah! Well, this is Mrs. Westmoreland, and my name is Pawlet.

VELBURG: My name—it is Carlo Velburg.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Passenger or crew, Mr. Velburg?

VELBURG: No. Not passenger. Not crew. Not'ing.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Well, no doubt you're busy—don't let us detain you.

VELBURG (*with sudden passion*): You think it is a joke, eh? It is not. It is tragic thing. I am not'ing because I have no country. And I cannot have a country because I have no passport. I am not alive, I am not real, I am not'ing—because I have not this piece of paper, this passport.

PROFESSOR: My dear young man, I've heard about people like you, and I'm extremely sorry. They won't let you stay anywhere, eh?

VELBURG: No. For ten years now I am sent away from everywhere. (*Not without pride.*) I have been in prison in Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, Jugo-Slavia, France, Belgium, England, United States, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Panama.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: But—good gracious!—what had you been doing?

VELBURG: Not'ing, Madam. I had no passport. I was born in Germany, but my father was Austrian, my mother a Jugo-Slav. My father was killed in the War. My mother took me to Dalmatia, and she died there because we had not'ing to eat—it was a—a—

PROFESSOR: Famine?

VELBURG: Yes. Big famine in Dalmatia.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Dear me, was there a famine there?

PROFESSOR: There were a lot of famines, in Central Europe just after the War, Mrs. Westmoreland. This isn't a very pleasant world, you know.

VELBURG (*with bitter emphasis*): You think it is a world of people. But as it is not any more. It is a world of pieces of paper. You think

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I am real—a young man, who wishes to work, to marry a nice girl, to have children, to drink a glass of beer and listen to music. But I am not. I am not'ing. I have no passport.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: But haven't you been able to *arrange* anything—through Cook's or something?

VELBURG: No, it is not possible. If I am rich—perhaps it would not be hard. But I am not rich, very poor.

PROFESSOR: What an idiotic world to live in! Young man, if I'd been you, I'd have *stolen* a passport.

VELBURG: I have stolen three, but always I am found out and go to prison. Afterwards, I am put on a ship—like this. Go away—they say—you do not belong here. That is why I say—I am not passenger, not crew, not'ing.

As they are staring at him sympathetically, MILES enters right.

MILES: I was just coming up, Velburg. Did you find those coils?

VELBURG: I have found just one, but it does not look too good. I came away to tell you I am very hungry now.

MILES: Okay, I'll carry on. Go along there to the smoke-room pantry, and ask Ripton, the steward, to fix you up.

VELBURG: Yes. Afterwards I help you again.

VELBURG goes out right.

MILES: The big set's hopeless, but if we can rig up a little temporary set, we can send out an SOS and give our position.

PROFESSOR: I suppose we've no electric power now, eh?

MILES: No. And what's left of the ship can't be steered. Just a drifting hulk. If you ask me, we're in a mess.

MILES goes out back. MRS. WESTMORELAND looks after him distastefully and then looks at PROFESSOR.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: If we're depending at all on that young man, I'm sorry. What's left of him will break down very soon.

PROFESSOR: The other young man, Jefferson's all right.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Yes, he's a fine dependable boy.

PROFESSOR: Well, he's in charge now. And the best thing he can do is to tell us all exactly how we stand and then allot us various tasks. There must be *something* even I can do—besides talk. I'll go and suggest it to him.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: One of the most annoying things about these crises is the way one misplaces one's possessions. Now I was doing a chair-cover in *petit-point*—it's been everywhere with me for the last twelve months—and now I can't find it and I feel *lost* without it.

As PROFESSOR moves slowly towards door right, BOYNE enters and stands in front of it. He is a big, brutal-looking chap about forty, dressed in torn shirt and trousers, and looking dirty and tousled. He sounds half-drunk.

BOYNE (*growling*): Ripton been along 'ere?

PROFESSOR: That's the little steward, isn't it?

BOYNE (*contemptuously*): Yes—little, 'alf-starved Cockney.

PROFESSOR: I haven't seen him. You look as if you put some hard work in, fighting that fire.

BOYNE: I look it and I bloody well feel it. Had to use a big axe for four hours, cutting away that fancy woodwork they put in ships for people like you, just to kid you you're still at home and not at sea.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: What's your name?

BOYNE: Patrick Boyne. What's yours?

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Mrs. Westmoreland. I've no doubt we're under an obligation to you, Mr. Boyne, but I think we'd feel it still more if you weren't so anxious to let us know how much we owe you.

BOYNE: Yah!

PROFESSOR: You're about done in, aren't you, Boyne?

BOYNE: I've been treating myself to a drop o' spirits. I don't often get the chance. So I'm a bit above myself, see? And that's easy when you've had nearly thirty years in stokeholes and fo'castles, sweating your guts out for stinking grub and a few quid a month. Just one of the mugs, that's what I've been.

PROFESSOR (*who wants to get past him to the door*): All right, Boyne. I want to go through there.

BOYNE: That's right. Stand aside for the little gen'l'man. That's what I've been doing too, for the last thirty years, after I've been sweating down below. (*Mimicking command.*) *Come on there, stand aside.* Now I've been working like a bloody nigger all night to save your ship, and it's still *Stand aside*. What about me staying here and you walking round just for a change, eh?

PROFESSOR: Don't talk like a fool, man. Nobody's trying to take advantage of you. There's no class nonsense about this. I want to go through that door and I can't do it if you're standing there, and it wouldn't alter the situation even if we'd hoisted the red flag. (*Very sharply.*) Thank you!

Almost involuntarily BOYNE moves a step away and PROFESSOR goes out. BOYNE looks after him, grinning then at MRS. WESTMORELAND.

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BOYNE: Didn't think he had it in him.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I fancy Professor Pawlet has a lot in him. Be careful you don't make that mistake once too often.

BOYNE (*belligerently*): Who's going to make mistakes? Yer see—getting warned off right from the start. The fire's out, so just keep your place, my man, that's it. You people don't know you're born, lady, you've had it all so soft.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I've had seven children. Try that next time you're on earth, Mr. Boyne, and see how soft it is.

BOYNE: My poor old mother had nine—in a back room off the dock road in Liverpool. You try that, lady, and then talk.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I'm sorry for your mother. But not for you. You're a big strong man, you should have done better for yourself.

BOYNE: So, that's a tip, is it? Every man for himself, eh? (MIRIAM PICK *enters from back*. *She is a dark, brooding, passionate woman about thirty, dressed in the neat clothes of a lady's maid.*) Hello, here's the nice handy piece that brought me a couple o' drinks last night. Well here we are, miss, all safe and sound.

MIRIAM: Yes, but for how long?

BOYNE: God knows!

MIRIAM: Does he?

BOYNE: Perhaps He does and then again perhaps He doesn't. This lady says it's every man for himself in this world, and she ought to know, she's been sitting pretty in it for a long time.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: You be careful, Mr. Boyne. It's quite true—you *are* getting above yourself.

MRS. WESTMORELAND *walks up to back and looks out*. BOYNE *goes nearer to MIRIAM*.

BOYNE: My turn, this morning, miss. Could you do a drink?

MIRIAM: Yes. And the stronger, the better.

BOYNE: You come with me.

They turn towards door right, but before they can move, VALENTINE AVON appears in this doorway. He is a man about forty, fairly good-looking and smartly dressed. He walks with an obvious limp. He is smoking a cigarette and carrying a glass half-filled with neat whisky. He is slightly tight.

VALENTINE: Good morning.

MRS. WESTMORELAND *turns at back*.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Good morning, Mr. Avon.

BOYNE (*to MIRIAM*): Come on. This way.

*They go out centre, VALENTINE watching them quizzically.
MRS. WESTMORELAND comes down.*

MRS. WESTMORELAND: That man, Boyne, will want watching. He's half-drunk already.

VALENTINE: He earned it last night. (*Drinks.*)

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Did *you*, Mr. Avon?

VALENTINE: I did what I could, Mrs. Westmoreland.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: You look very spick and span this morning.

VALENTINE: I still have my own cabin and things, you see. I was lucky—being on the top deck—aft. Turned in to sleep, about six this morning, but only managed an hour or two. So—I rose—and dressed with great care—very, very slowly.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Did you have any breakfast?

VALENTINE: Been having it for the last two hours.

Shows her whisky and cigarette.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Is that neat whisky?

VALENTINE: Yes, I'm very much afraid it is.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Mr. Avon—you're not half-drunk too, are you, by any chance?

VALENTINE: Yes—I should say—just about.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Then I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

VALENTINE: Why?

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Because it's simply giving way before a crisis.

VALENTINE: You mean—I ought to be my ordinary normal self?

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Of course you ought.

VALENTINE: Then you're on my side, and you mustn't blame me. Last night, I kept quite sober. All night. The Fourth Officer can prove it. But this morning I decided that I oughtn't, as you say, to give way before a crisis, I ought to be my ordinary self. So here I am—as you rather crudely put it—half-drunk already.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I've been one of your admiring readers for years and you're not going to tell me, Mr. Avon, that you're often in this condition.

VALENTINE: Certainly I am. Of course I've developed a good technique for disguising it. A perpetual slightly glazed eye. A lazy drawl. And of course my limp helps.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: But why should a man in your position—a very successful author—with everything he wants— (*Hesitates.*)

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VALENTINE: Perpetually fuddle himself. (*Stops to drink. He is now leaning against one of the tables, at ease.*) Well now, to begin with, my position, as you call it, is not as good as you think it is. No doubt, in your opinion—and you may be sure I value it—I am still a very successful author. But I trust you won't mind my saying that it isn't *your* opinion that makes a very successful author.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I don't suppose it is. In fact, I've given up trying to understand what is behind literary reputations nowadays. The rubbish I've had recommended to me! I don't believe *anybody* likes the stuff. But what makes you drink so much?

VALENTINE: I think I'm afraid of reality. You see, Mrs. Westmoreland, after my leg was shot to bits in the War, when I was still only a boy, I spent a long time in hospital, and there I began to amuse and console myself by living in a little dream world. Pure escape, of course.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Why shouldn't you escape? A boy, shot to pieces, everything in him terribly hurt!

VALENTINE: Yes. Well, I found afterwards that I could write about this little dream world—you know—with its too beautiful gracious ladies, whimsical witty men, its cardboard cities and toy countrysides, its charming coincidences, its delicious little romances—all far, far away from the sweat and blood and tears and filth of the real world. And you all liked these fairy tales of mine.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I did. And I still do.

VALENTINE: Thank you. But I haven't, for a long time. That little world has worn terribly, terribly thin. It's dropping to pieces, like my little reputation. The game's nearly up.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: You're not going to tell me you can't still make plenty of money, Mr. Avon.

VALENTINE: No, that's not the trouble. The trouble is, you see, I don't like it any more, and I can't do anything else, and I'm frightened. I don't feel real. I know I hardly exist any longer. So the only thing to do—just to keep going—is—well——

He drinks to show her.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Mr. Avon, I've been looking at and listening to men for a long, long time, and to this day I don't know whether to laugh or cry at their childish idiocy. But surely you've built up some sort of life that means something to you? A wife? Children? A mistress? Friends?

VALENTINE: No. And, believe me, it's easy not to when you're a fashionable scribbler, flitting about the earth. The unreality runs through everything you see.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Wasn't last night real enough for you?

ACT I

PEOPLE AT SEA

VALENTINE: No, because it was something pushed on to me from outside.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: How old are you?

VALENTINE: Thirty-eight.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: You won't thank me for telling you, but in my opinion you're still just a young fool, nearer twenty than forty. And even forty's no sensible age.

VALENTINE: You asked me questions and I've tried to give you truthful answers. Please don't imagine I'm being sorry for myself.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: That shows how young you really are. Why shouldn't people be sorry for themselves now and then? All silly pride, pretending not to be. I'm often sorry for myself, and make no bones about it. As a matter of fact, I'm sorry for myself now—stuck on this ridiculous cinder of a ship—and I'm going to see if somebody will make me a cup of tea.

VALENTINE: Try the smoke-room pantry. Can I——

MRS. WESTMORELAND: No, you stay here and finish your whisky and be still sorrier for yourself. Good gracious! If I were thirty years younger, I'd set about you.

MRS. WESTMORELAND *goes out right. VALENTINE looks after her, obviously not knowing whether to laugh or be annoyed. Then he goes over to the notice-board and looks with sardonic amusement at the various notices there. While he is doing this, DIANA LISMORE appears outside back, staring about her, looking in and then finally coming in, in an uncertain manner. She is a glamorous creature—it is her profession—and she really is, with a great deal of real charm too, but the fact remains that she is in her later thirties and has not led a very sensible regular life. Having just come out of a heavily drugged sleep, she is now very wan, and controls herself badly. She is wearing—carelessly but gracefully—odd but good clothes, and also a pair of enormous dark spectacles. She enters from the back, a completely bewildered woman. VALENTINE is half-turned away from her.*

DIANA (*slowly*): I say, would you mind telling me what's happened—and where everybody is?

VALENTINE: I'm sorry, madam, but I'm a stranger here.

DIANA: Either I've gone completely mad or you're Valentine Avon.

He turns sharply at this, and stares at her. She takes off her dark glasses.

VALENTINE: Diana! I didn't know you were on this ship.

DIANA: I crawled on during the night at Colon and insisted on

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calling myself Florence Montgomery—I thought it might be restful. And now will you tell me what's happened and where everybody is?

VALENTINE: *Don't you know?*

She shakes her head weakly.

DIANA: Well?

VALENTINE: Yesterday the ship caught on fire. They launched the boats. There was a bad squall. The last boat was smashed, leaving eleven of us stranded here. The fire began dying down and we managed to put it out last night.

DIANA: So that's why everything seems even smellier and dirtier than usual.

VALENTINE: Yes, it's quite a different-looking ship now, y'know. But where were you during all the hullabaloo?

DIANA: Asleep.

VALENTINE: You couldn't have slept through all that!

DIANA: I did. You see, my cabin's that one by itself—right at the—at the back.

VALENTINE: Aft. Aft.

DIANA: Aft. I was too aft to notice anything.

He looks closely at her.

VALENTINE: Diana, how long has this been going on?

DIANA: I don't know what you're talking about, Val.

VALENTINE: How long have you been doping yourself?

DIANA: I don't dope myself.

VALENTINE: I'm sorry, but you're still half-doped now.

DIANA: I had to have something. I went down to Mexico, then to Central America, and that was a mistake and—and something else—went wrong. I hadn't slept for weeks. I felt I was going mad. I was desperate. I had to sleep, I simply had to.

VALENTINE: I see. But even now, it doesn't make sense. They knew you were there, they wouldn't have left you. Were you alone?

DIANA: No, my maid was with me, sleeping in the outer cabin. Oh!

VALENTINE: What is it?

DIANA: I've just realised what it feels like—to know that somebody wants to murder you. . . . Longing to see you dead. . . . I knew she was beginning to hate me.

VALENTINE: She may have simply lost her head, y'know. Some people did. Though even then I can't understand why the steward didn't get you up—

DIANA: Because she took care that he didn't. Probably told him I was already out. You had to go through her cabin, you see, to get to mine. Oh—the damnable Miriam!

VALENTINE: That her name?

DIANA: Miriam Pick. It sounds like a murderess, doesn't it?

VALENTINE: Yes. Miriam Pick! But she's still here on the ship.

DIANA: My God! Val—I can't go roaming the ship—I feel like death——

VALENTINE: Hadn't you better go back to your cabin?

DIANA: No, the very sight of it now would give me the horrors. But I've something to say to that woman. Find her for me, Val.

VALENTINE: You ought to take it easy, Diana.

DIANA: How can I when I've nearly been murdered? For God's sake—Val—don't stand there like an idiot—making me want to scream at you—find her—bring her here—please, please, please—hurry up——

VALENTINE: All right.

He pauses a moment to remember where she went, then goes off. Left to herself, DIANA is almost at the mercy of her tortured nerves. She has some difficulty with a scarf or handkerchief and savagely tears it. With a tremendous effort, she pulls herself together, and does her face quickly. Then she closes her eyes, calming herself, and waits. VALENTINE returns and MIRIAM follows him sullenly.

VALENTINE: Diana, I think it'll save you a lot of fuss if I go now and tell the others about you. I'll make up some yarn.

DIANA: Can you?

VALENTINE: Yes. After all, it's my trade to tell unlikely stories.

DIANA: Thank you, darling. That'll be a great help.

VALENTINE goes out. DIANA and MIRIAM look at each other.

DIANA (quietly): It nearly came off, Miriam, but just not quite. (Pauses, but MIRIAM says nothing.) I've known for some time you hated me, but I didn't realise you were ready to murder me.

MIRIAM: Hadn't you better come out of that dope before you start talking?

DIANA: I am out of it. I know what I'm saying—as you'll soon see, you damned ungrateful murderous slut. Not only you didn't try to save me yourself, but you saw to it that nobody else did. I'll bet when that alarm went and they came round, you stood there in that cabin of yours, with my door shut behind you, and told them I'd already gone on deck. Didn't you? You needn't lie. I can see it in your face.

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MIRIAM: Well, go on.

DIANA: You went to get into your boat, certain that very soon I'd be burned to death or drowned, and not giving a damn—gloating over it, probably with most of my valuable things in your bag. My God!—yes—I haven't looked at my things yet. That's robbery and bad enough—but the other's murder—just cold-blooded murder. And now where are you?

MIRIAM (*coolly*): Here. Where you are. And if you think we're all safe and sound now, you're wrong. We're not out of it yet.

DIANA: I may not be out of it yet, but you're never going to be out of it. Whatever happens, you're going to be for it. The first thing I do when we're off this ship is to have you charged with deliberately preventing me from being rescued, wanting me to go down with the ship, and you haven't a chance of denying it. The filthy ingratitude of it! I took you out of a Birmingham slum, let you go everywhere with me, treated you——

MIRIAM: I'll tell you how you treated me. Not like a dog, because your dogs always came first. They do with your sort. You treated me as if I was a half-daft slave you'd got out of prison. I can be grateful. I *was* grateful at first, but you soon knocked that out of me, with all your damned airs and whims and stinking selfishness. If you couldn't eat, I hadn't to eat. If you couldn't sleep, I hadn't to sleep. If you wanted to whine and drivel about yourself, I had to listen till I was nearly crazy. Then it was—*Take that, Fetch this, Hurry up*. The glamorous Diana Lismore! Just a handful of silly monkey tricks. No sense, no guts, and no real heart. Tough as hell with me, or any fool of a man who'd fall for you, but soft as putty when you're up against anything. Forever complaining and whining because they're all beginning to see through you——

DIANA: Don't worry, Miriam. I won't be soft any more.

MIRIAM: You won't believe me—but all the same I'll tell you something. Yesterday, when that alarm went off and they were all shouting, I went into your cabin and called you. And then when you didn't stir but just went on sleeping peacefully, then—for the first time for months and months—I didn't hate you, I felt sorry for you.

DIANA: And so left me to be drowned.

MIRIAM: Yes, left you to go on sleeping peacefully for ever.

DIANA: Very good of you!

MIRIAM: Why, you fool, what more did you want? Haven't you been telling me for weeks and weeks and weeks that you'd nothing to live for? Didn't you say over and over again that you wished you were dead—if you could only die easily? Weren't you going mad, you said,

because you couldn't sleep? All you wanted was to sleep and sleep. You filled yourself up with dope—saying you didn't care how dangerous it might be—so that you could be sure of having a good long sleep. Well, why should I try and waken you up out of that sleep, try and get you over the side into a boat, still doped and half-crazy? You'd got what you wanted—and if the ship had gone down, you'd never have known about it.

DIANA: I would. God!—it would have been awful, awful! Alone!

MIRIAM: Well, now you're awake again. Suppose you're saved. Now ask yourself this—saved *for what*? To fill yourself with more dope? Or to keep somebody else awake night after night; telling 'em your life's over, crying about your disappointments—and there'll be plenty of 'em, they'll come in thick and fast—and asking God to let you have a nice long peaceful sleep. You're alive—but *what have you got to live for*?

DIANA: The other thing—leaving me in that cabin—I might possibly have forgiven you. But for what you've said now—and the way you've said it—I'll never forgive you, never, never!

MIRIAM: You might notice I'm not asking to be forgiven.

DIANA: You're going to get what you deserve.

MIRIAM: Better not talk too big, Miss Lismore. We're not off this ship yet. We may never get off it.

MIRIAM stares defiantly at her. VALENTINE enters hastily. As soon as he starts talking, MIRIAM swings away and goes out.

DIANA looks near to breaking down again.

VALENTINE: Diana, in a few minutes we're all meeting in here—it's about the only comfortable place left. I don't suppose you feel fit to meet the lot of them at once——

DIANA: No, no. Not now.

VALENTINE: Better go back to your cabin and rest.

DIANA: Thank you, Val. You're being very sweet to me. Strange we should meet like this—after—how long?

VALENTINE: Eight years.

DIANA: Yes, I suppose it is. Eight years. When did you stop being in love with me, Val?

VALENTINE: I don't know exactly. You took some getting out of my system.

DIANA: What a foul way of putting it! As if I were an attack of something!

VALENTINE: You were.

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DIANA: Then you couldn't have been really in love with me.

VALENTINE: I was.

DIANA: Why were you, I wonder?

VALENTINE: Because—I think—you seemed to be an inhabitant—the only one I'd ever met in the flesh—of that little unreal fairy-tale world I've always written about. It was like meeting one of my own exquisite heroines. You had all their qualities but of course an extra enchantment just because you lived independently of me, had a life of your own. Then when you appeared in my play, that did for me.

DIANA: It was a lovely little play, Val.

VALENTINE: No, it wasn't, my dear. It was as cheap and false as hell.

DIANA: Dar-ling, you're not going all tough and proletarian, are you, like so many of these writers in Hollywood?

VALENTINE: No. I'm not going anything. I'm just half a man on half a boat. I must have just missed you in Hollywood, by the way.

DIANA: What a pity! They didn't tell me you were coming out. I simply had to go. The place was stifling me. I said "I don't care even if I'm losing millions of dollars, I must go." So I went down into Mexico and then through jungles and things into Central America—I'm simply crazy now about the Mayan remains—what a marvellous civilisation!—and now I'm ready for the Theatre again, ready to create something for my own public again.

VALENTINE: I'm not an interviewer, you know, Diana.

DIANA: Isn't that rather a stupid remark, Val?

VALENTINE: You think so?

DIANA: Yes. You've changed. You didn't make stupid remarks once. What's the matter with you?

VALENTINE: The matter is—I've come to the end, whether this hulk goes down or not, and I'm too weary to play your little game with you any more. Let's have some truth before the sea swallows us. You left Hollywood not because it stifled you but because you couldn't get another decent part. You were "all washed up" there, as they say. You went down into Mexico and Central America with some man, probably a Latin American on the loose, and got into a mess. You don't know anything about the Mayan civilisation and don't care a damn. You're ready for the London Theatre again because it's all you've got left, and you're not too hopeful about that. I'm sorry, but you asked for it.

DIANA: You ought to have some nice chats with my ex-maid, Miriam, Val—about me—and other things. She's just such another

rough, honest creature as yourself. I didn't know you had it in for me too, and were just waiting until somebody else had knocked me down, so that you could take a few good kicks at me.

VALENTINE: I'm sorry, Diana. I wasn't trying to hurt you.

DIANA: Why do *you* dislike me now?

VALENTINE: I don't. There's something about you—even now—that wrings my heart. I don't dislike *you*, but I dislike myself. (*With tremendous emphasis.*) I hate myself.

DIANA: I see. But please remember I've only just wakened from a long sleep—the first I've had for weeks—and I'm all confused, bewildered, rather frightened. Like waking into a dream. The ship all charred and deserted. My maid leaving me to drown. You here. I really am what you said you were, a stranger here. . . . (*Pause, looking at him intently, then suddenly.*) Oh—Val—you and I—a long wall somewhere—wistaria in the rain—great bunches of wet blossom. They were so close, so vivid, I could have put out my hand and touched them. Where was that, Val? Can you remember?

VALENTINE (*hesitating*): No . . . let's see. . . .

DIANA: It doesn't matter. It's all dead and gone. . . . Youth . . . all dead and gone.

NONA *enters, young, fresh, eager and goes straight over to DIANA, who by great effort becomes her usual self again.*

NONA: Gosh, yes! I remember you, Miss Lismore. I saw you in that Theatre Guild thing about Old Vienna, and then in some picture. I was in high school then, and we were all crazy about you. Sophisticated glamour—it just tore us kids wide open.

DIANA: And I always loved your New York audiences, so keen and intelligent and appreciative. Let me see—you're—

NONA: Nona Stockton. Here with my uncle, who's having a great time now—cooking.

DIANA: Such an adventure, isn't it? So stupid of me to have missed last night, but I've always been late for everything, haven't I, Val?

VALENTINE: Everything but the curtain calls.

NONA: We're going to work out now what our jobs are to be, aren't we, Mr. Avon?

DIANA: Then that's another reason why I ought to go and lie down. I'm always lazy—quite useless—at sea.

Enter BOYNE, MIRIAM and RIPTON from left. DIANA turns to

VALENTINE.

Which way do I go?

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He takes her towards the back. As they go out, MILES and VELBURG are seen waiting to enter, and do so, as soon as door is clear, while VALENTINE leads DIANA off right.

NONA (*as MILES enters*): Have you got that set working yet, Mr. Miles?

MILES: Not yet, Miss Stockton. But it oughtn't to be long now before we're sending out our S O S. Don't you worry.

NONA: I'm not worrying. Say, I *like* this. It's fun.

BOYNE: You won't think it's fun if the sea gets up and starts hitting them buckled plates.

MILES: Shut up.

BOYNE: I won't. You get your bleeding wireless going and don't give me orders.

Enter right PROFESSOR PAWLET, ASHFORD MYRICKS and FRANK JEFFERSON, now wearing his white uniform coat and looking tidy. He exchanges a grin with NONA. The rest now disperse themselves, some sitting, some standing.

FRANK: We're not all here yet, are we? Have you seen the others?

VALENTINE now enters from the back.

VALENTINE: I've just left Miss Lismore with Mrs. Westmoreland. That's all right, isn't it? You don't want them.

FRANK: No, so long as someone tells them exactly how we stand. (*Now addresses them all.*) Well now, although this ship was officially abandoned, we had to stay in her, and I'm in temporary command. As I'll be held responsible for your lives, I expect you all—passengers as well as crew—

BOYNE: Did you say crew?

FRANK: I'm talking now, Boyne. Keep quiet. I expect you all to do whatever I ask you to do. That's fair enough, isn't it?

MYRICKS: Certainly, Mr. Jefferson. Only reasonable.

FRANK: We've plenty of stores and water. In this weather the ship'll keep afloat all right, though of course we can't navigate her.

PROFESSOR: Where are we, Mr. Jefferson?

FRANK: Not in a bad position at all, sir. About three hundred miles South of Haiti, and a bit less than that North of the coast of Colombia. At the moment we're drifting East by South. Roughly towards the Windward Islands.

NONA: Cheers for the Windward Islands!

FRANK: But they're a good eight hundred miles away.

MYRICKS: Say, are we near any regular shipping routes?

FRANK: Yes, sir, fairly near. The fruit lines go from Barbados or Trinidad to La Guaira, Curacao, Santamarta, and on to Colon. Once we can send out our S O S and our approximate position, we should be easily picked up.

MILES: If we can send out a message, the other ships can estimate our position. And I'll try and have a temporary set working by to-night.

PROFESSOR: Well, then, here we are, a separate little community, and the best thing we can do is to apportion out our tasks.

FRANK: I was coming to that sir. Ripton will see to the stores, table, and cleaning. And Mr. Myricks and Miss Stockton have volunteered to do the cooking. Miles and Velburg will be in the wireless room. Now there'll have to be a look-out all the time. Our safety will depend on that. Boyne is the only seaman here, so he and I will have to divide the main watches.

VALENTINE: I'm no seaman, but at least I can use my eyes.

PROFESSOR: Just what I was about to say.

FRANK: Thank you, gentlemen. You'll be in my watch, Mr. Avon and Professor Pawlet, you'll be with Boyne. I'll work out the times later.

MIRIAM: Wait a minute, what about me?

FRANK: Oh—well—you'd better—y'know—make yourself useful—look after the ladies.

MIRIAM: I'm sick to death of looking after ladies. Let 'em look after themselves for once. I want to be on watch too. My eyes are as good as any of yours, and I'm used to keeping awake——

FRANK: All right, I'll see if I can fit you in. Well, there you are. It might be better but it might be a lot worse, and I've no doubt, with any luck, we'll be taken off within a day or two, and you'll go home, having had an amusing adventure, something to tell your friends about.

NONA: Gosh—yes!

BOYNE: And then after that me and Ripton 'ere's walking the streets, rattling the last two coppers in our pockets, looking for another ship. And they'll be putting that poor devil there (*pointing to VELBURG*), back into clink 'cos he hasn't got a passport.

MIRIAM: He isn't the only one who might go into clink either.

BOYNE: 'Ello, 'ello, this is a bit o' news.

FRANK: Wait a minute, Boyne, we've had enough from you just now. Who d'you think you are?

BOYNE: Well, who do *you* think I am?

FRANK: A deck-hand with a big mouth. Shut it.

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BOYNE: Same old carry-on. Last night, when your ship was burning, it was *Good Old Boyne*. Now it's—

FRANK: I'll tell you—shut up.

BOYNE *gives him a look, then swings away and goes out left.*

RIPTON *follows him.*

MYRICKS (*quietly*): That big sailor's been hitting the liquor this morning.

FRANK: I know. I'll have it all under lock and key very soon. All right, Sparks, carry on.

VELBURG (*as MILES moves*): I help him, yes?

FRANK: Yes.

VELBURG: So that we can be rescued, eh?

FRANK: Yes, of course.

VELBURG: And then I go on another ship and then to another prison because I have no passport.

FRANK: That's not our fault. And it's better than drowning.

VELBURG: I wonder if it is.

MIRIAM: It's a damned rotten shame. What's the boy done?

PROFESSOR: Mr. Velburg, for a world rapidly sinking into complete brutal idiocy, I apologise to you.

VELBURG: You laugh at me, eh?

PROFESSOR: Good Lord, no!

MILES: Come on, Velburg.

MILES *goes out back and VELBURG hastily follows him.*

NONA: Uncle, either leave me with that pantry or come and snap into it.

MYRICKS: You take your orders from me, girl.

NONA: I can cook the pants off you.

MIRIAM: You're having a lot of fun, aren't you?

NONA: Yes, why not?

They look at one another, then MIRIAM goes out left. NONA looks at FRANK, raises her eyebrows, winks, then goes out right with her uncle.

VALENTINE: How's the glass, Jefferson?

FRANK: Still rising—thank God!

VALENTINE: If it suddenly drops, I take it we're sunk.

FRANK: It wouldn't be too healthy.

VALENTINE: Well, we're all in the same leaky boat.

PROFESSOR: We have always been, my dear sir, but who cares, who

ACT I

PEOPLE AT SEA

cares? You know, this little community of ours, this microcosm of society, doesn't strike me as being very Utopian. I detect in its structure already certain dangerous flaws and wayward tendencies. . . ,

FRANK: If you mean there might be trouble, Professor Pawlet, you're not far wrong.

FRANK *goes out.* The PROFESSOR *pulls a typescript out of his pocket and begins to read.*

VALENTINE (*going out*): I need a drink.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SCENE I

Evening of the following day. Scene same as before except that now it is lighted with emergency oil lamps, making several pools of light. In one of them, MRS. WESTMORELAND, DIANA, VALENTINE, and MYRICKS are playing bridge. MRS. WESTMORELAND and VALENTINE against DIANA and MYRICKS, who is still wearing a cook's apron and is smoking a cigar. The others are dressed in ordinary clothes. A way from them, PROFESSOR PAWLET is smoking a pipe and reading. Door at back can be open, to show deep night, and just a faint glitter of stars. Sea can be heard. The four play in silence for a few moments, finishing a hand played by MRS. WESTMORELAND.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Thirty below and thirty above. I think you might have given me two, partner.

VALENTINE: I hadn't one and half quick tricks, y'know. (*Suddenly laughs.*)

MYRICKS: What's the joke?

VALENTINE: I suddenly thought how idiotic it was—to be sitting here, in a burnt-out ship, drifting about the Caribbean—saying "I hadn't one and a half quick tricks, y'know."

MRS. WESTMORELAND: It would be just as idiotic if we were simply sitting here, *not* playing bridge.

DIANA: After all, the whole world's a sort of burnt-out thing, isn't it, careering round and round?

PROFESSOR: Probably not.

MYRICKS: How d'you make that out, Professor?

PROFESSOR: Probably the world isn't moving at all in the way we think it is, and probably it isn't even a globe.

MYRICKS: Now wait a minute——

PROFESSOR: We know that the universe is at least four-dimensional. What we see and what science investigates is merely a three-dimensional cross-section of a four or multi-dimensional reality. So we haven't the least idea what things are really like.

DIANA: Are you being a comfort or not?

PROFESSOR: Probably not.

VALENTINE: What's that monster of a script you've got?

PROFESSOR: I've been engaged on this work for the last five years, and I think I can say it is a massive piece of reasoning. It's called the Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Conditioned Values.

DIANA: Does that mean anything?

PROFESSOR: Certainly, Miss Lismore. It means . . .

MRS. WESTMORELAND (*firmly*): It's your deal, Mr. Myricks.

MYRICKS: Oh—certainly—Mrs. Westmoreland.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I think that's why one likes cards more and more, the older one gets. One knows what they're really like and where one is with them. The King of Spades stays the King of Spades and doesn't turn into something else. And he'll always win the trick above the Queen or Knave. All very dependable.

VALENTINE: That's what we think about him. But perhaps *he* thinks he's having the most extraordinary adventures.

DIANA: You're not going all whimsical, are you, Val?

VALENTINE: No. But I was wondering if higher beings could play cards with us—I mean, use us in that way.

PROFESSOR: Assuming, for the moment, the existence of beings of an infinitely higher power——

MRS. WESTMORELAND: No, you don't, Professor Pawlet, not now. We must finish this rubber. Your call, Mr. Myricks.

MYRICKS: Heart.

VALENTINE: Spade.

DIANA: No Bid.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Two No Trumps!

MYRICKS: A-ha!

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Yes—ah-ah!

MYRICKS: Well—by me.

VALENTINE: No Bid.

DIANA: No Bid.

MRS. WESTMORELAND *begins playing*. NONA and FRANK, *who have now the appearance of lovers, stroll in but do not come in far*.

PROFESSOR *looks up and smiles at NONA, who is looking very happy*.

PROFESSOR: What have you two been doing?

NONA: Looking at the stars.

PROFESSOR: Which stars?

NONA: I don't know—just stars.

PROFESSOR: Ah!

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NONA: It's a night and a half out there. Everything turned on. Heavenly. Isn't it, Frank?

FRANK *nods*. DIANA *has been staring at them with a certain wistful envy*.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: You to play, Miss Lismore.

DIANA: Oh!—sorry.

She plays. NONA looks at FRANK and nods her head in direction of door at back. He nods and smiles, and they go out again. We catch a glimpse of her putting her hand in his arm as they stand a moment outside, still in the light, and then they walk away. PROFESSOR looks after them smiling, then returns to his book. The bridge players finish their game.

MRS. WESTMORELAND (*briskly*): The rest are mine. Seventy below. And another thirty. And seven hundred for rubber. Twelve hundred altogether, I think. Thank you—partner.

MYRICKS: Well, Miss Lismore, they had the luck, I guess.

DIANA: I never have *any* luck, and I'm a rotten player, so why I ever bother with it, I don't know.

MYRICKS: Well, what about a drink? I'll ring while you're making your minds up.

VALENTINE: Ring!

MYRICKS: Gosh!—I was forgetting. Honestly, I wasn't fooling. Clean forgotten. Just habit. That shows you, doesn't it, Professor?

PROFESSOR: It was the temporary abstraction of the cards that did it, of course. Our minds——

DIANA: This morning, I was quite furious when I woke up because there wasn't any orange juice. I rang several times before I realised where I was.

MYRICKS: I've got some orange juice in my pantry. Tell me the time you want it, Miss Lismore, and I'll bring you some in the morning.

VALENTINE: Don't spoil her, Myricks. This is her one chance to find out what life's really like.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: And what is it really like?

VALENTINE: Well—bells and orange juice in the morning aren't part of it. Only a lucky accident.

DIANA: That's rubbish, Val. You'll say next it's a lucky accident we have shoes to wear and aren't going barefoot.

VALENTINE: No, I'd say that shoes can be taken for granted. But only about two pairs—and shabby at that. Fifteen pairs of new ones—

a different colour for every dress—they're certainly a lucky accident. And whoever you are, you may have to say good-bye to all that at any moment.

PROFESSOR: It's a question of striking a balance of what may reasonably be expected, by a member of one of the so-called civilised communities. Now——

MRS. WESTMORELAND: We may have to say good-bye to everything yet. The minute I get outside this room, where one doesn't notice much, I've no confidence whatever in the ship, or what's left of it.

VALENTINE: I've never had any confidence whatever in any ship. The owners know that, and that's why they try to disguise the fact that they are ships and make them look like the Midland Hotel, Manchester.

DIANA: I knew a Broadway manager who spent four days at the Savoy—he was drunk or had 'flu or something—under the impression that he was still in the *Berengaria*.

Enter VELBURG from back. He shows traces of some excitement.

VELBURG: The officer—he is not here?

PROFESSOR (*as they all turn and stare*): He's out on deck.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: What's happened, Mr. Velburg?

VELBURG: At last—we have got a message through. (*They react at once to this.*) Only bits of message. It is still difficult. The set is bad. But there is a ship—the *Orsata*—and they have answered us. It is a cruise ship.

VALENTINE: How far away is she?

VELBURG: We cannot tell properly yet. It is difficult. Six hours? Twelve hours? But she is coming to us.

MYRICKS: Then we're saved.

VELBURG: Yes, *you* are saved.

MYRICKS: Sure! And so are you.

VELBURG: I need also a piece of paper—a passport—before I am saved.

Goes out, back, to find FRANK. The others rise, except PROFESSOR, and show considerable animation.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Well, that's that. I knew it would be all right. I've never really been worried.

VALENTINE: Except—you know—the *Orsata* isn't here yet. A lot of things can happen at sea.

DIANA: Val, don't be a misery.

PROFESSOR: Mr. Avon, you seem to me to lack confidence in life—that instinctive animal faith——

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VALENTINE: Yes, I do. Don't you?

PROFESSOR: On the whole—no.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Neither do I.

MYRICKS: I'm with you. Things don't always pan out too well—look at the market—but you believe in life and it'll take care of you.

VALENTINE: It's all a question of dates. You three were brought up in the age of security. You just can't help feeling secure. But there's twenty years between us, and that makes all the difference. I can't help feeling insecure. As soon as I hold something comfortably in my hands, I wonder how soon somebody's going to take a crack at it and blow it to hell.

DIANA: If you're going to do the well-known *Lost Generation* act, Val, I'm going straight to bed. The Great War's been over a long time now.

VALENTINE: It hasn't. It's never stopped. And for all we know, the Still Greater War might have started now.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Don't be absurd! What's the use of worrying about what might happen. The point is—and you ought to be thankful—that we're not burnt to death or drowned and apparently the *Orsata* is on her way to rescue us. And, really, what more could you want? You're extremely ungrateful, Mr. Avon. (*Moves, then smiles at him.*) Probably you've too much imagination.

VALENTINE: What! You can tell me that and then say you've read my novels.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Certainly. I think your stories are full of imagination.

VALENTINE: They're not. They haven't had any real imagination in them for years and years. They're drivel.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: It's rather dark out there. Will one of you please see me as far as my cabin door? (*All three men step forward, but MYRICKS is first.*) Thank you, Mr. Myricks. Good night. I don't know whether I'll sleep, but I'm going to try.

The others say Good night as she goes, accompanied by

PROFESSOR: A very charming woman, with a great deal of character.

DIANA: Too much when she's playing bridge. Now what will you say about me after I've gone out, Professor Pawlet?

VALENTINE: Don't tell her.

DIANA: Shut up, Val! I want to know. Honestly now!

PROFESSOR: Well—now——

DIANA: Charming?

PROFESSOR: Certainly. And beautiful.

DIANA: Really? Beautiful?

PROFESSOR: Unquestionably.

VALENTINE: This is making me feel sick.

DIANA: Go away then. (*To PROFESSOR.*) Character?

PROFESSOR: Shall I tell you?

VALENTINE: Yes, go on, tell her. Give her the works.

PROFESSOR: You've lived, of course, in a world that is quite strange to me.

VALENTINE: And thank your stars for that, Professor! It's a lunatic world—hers——

DIANA: You ought to know.

VALENTINE: I do. (*To PROFESSOR.*) Go on. Tell her the truth. She never hears it.

DIANA: No, never! Just worshipped by everybody, I am. Sheltered and shielded all the time!

PROFESSOR: Most of us go through life feeling that though we may not be much to look at there is *something* about us—a natural shrewdness, kindness, humour, whatever it may be—that might possibly repay those who will take the trouble to know us better.

VALENTINE: True!

PROFESSOR: But you, Miss Lismore, create an immediate effect. You cannot help it. Even if your profession didn't insist upon your doing so, you would still create an immediate effect. Men desire you. Women envy you. Even sensible persons——

DIANA: Professors of philosophy?

PROFESSOR: Yes. I say, even sensible persons react at once to you.

DIANA: There now! Go on.

PROFESSOR: Unlike most of us, then, your reality is in your appearance.

DIANA: Well—I don't know about that.

PROFESSOR: Exactly. Now, like the rest of us, you can't help feeling that your *real* self is behind this appearance, that you too have a *something*. But the immediate effect of your appearance is so astonishing, the reaction to it so strong, that the real self behind—with its *something*—always appears inadequate. Therefore you feel that nobody really knows you, understands you, or really cares about you.

DIANA: I say—— Go on.

PROFESSOR: Therefore you find it impossible to live in a real world of persons. So you live in a world of sensations. But a world of

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sensations—without persons and their relationships—is a false world, and one that is for ever shrinking——

DIANA: Stop it! (*Regarding him with mixed alarm, wonder and admiration.*) You devil!

PROFESSOR: Thank you.

DIANA: D'you know, deep down I always thought people like you didn't really know anything worth knowing, that it was all bluff.

PROFESSOR: Bluff comes into it. There's nearly as much bluff inside universities as there is outside.

DIANA (*indicating VALENTINE*): Do him some time for me, please.

VALENTINE: He needn't. I can do myself, 'thank you. It's a pity we're apparently being rescued so soon. This might have been the most profitable trip you'd ever made, Diana.

DIANA: I know. Rough stuff for the spoilt darling, eh?

VALENTINE: Yes, and why not? As it is, I suppose in eight hours time you'll be queening it on the *Orsata*——

DIANA: Yes, and what a story for the Press!

VALENTINE: It's time we started being real people and not stories for the Press.

DIANA: Your real people are only people who'd like to be news but can't.

VALENTINE: They aren't. I don't mean half-dead half-wits. I'm talking about *real people*.

DIANA: Well, *where* are they and *who* are they?

PROFESSOR: Here. I'm one.

DIANA: Yes, Professor, you're sweet. No, you're not, you're a devil. Pity the *Orsata's* on a cruise. I loathe the sort of people who go on cruises.

VALENTINE: Yes, and won't it be terrible if they haven't just the right kind of orange juice?

DIANA: You won't believe it, but he used to be quite charming. And he'll have to be charming again when we get on to the *Orsata* and he meets his dear public again.

As she smiles maliciously at VALENTINE and he glares at her, MILES enters right hurriedly, very agitated.

MILES: Where's Jefferson? Somebody's broken the set.

VALENTINE: What?

MILES: I said, somebody's broken the set. Deliberately smashed it. Just now. I wasn't out of the wireless room two minutes. That girl said she could see something—a light.

DIANA: What girl?

MILES: Your maid or whatever she is.

DIANA: Miriam Pick! Don't trust her a yard. That woman's ready to smash anything.

MILES: It wasn't her. How could it be when I was with her, out on deck, when the set was smashed?

DIANA: Well, I'll bet she's something to do with it. She wouldn't care if we all drowned.

VALENTINE: Oh, drop it, Diana. That doesn't make sense.

DIANA: It does to me.

MILES: We were just getting something through from the *Oxata*. My God!—what a thing to happen! Quite deliberate. Must have been. You can see for yourselves. I must find Jefferson.

Goes out back hurriedly. The other three look at one another.

PROFESSOR: He's almost hysterical.

VALENTINE: Well he might be. Our lives depend on that set working. I'm going up to have a look at it.

As he arrives at door right, MIRIAM opens it and looks in. Then she comes in slowly, and VALENTINE goes out.

MIRIAM (to PROFESSOR): Boyne says it's time for you to go on watch.

DIANA: Boyne says!

PROFESSOR: That's all right, Miss Lismore. Boyne's my superior officer for the time being. After all, he's a seaman and I'm not. Quite right.

PROFESSOR picks up book and goes out left. MIRIAM and DIANA look at one another.

DIANA: Well, I suppose you're going to tell me now that you had the wireless set smashed just because you were sorry for me.

MIRIAM: What do I know about it? I thought I saw a light and so I called that wireless fellow——

DIANA: I know. So it couldn't have been you. But it's very strange—isn't it?—that as soon as you take him away from his wireless room, somebody pops in and breaks the set.

MIRIAM: Hadn't you better say I knew all about it? Go on, don't mind me.

DIANA: No, I don't say that. I'm just wondering, that's all.

MIRIAM: Have you ever thought that if I told all I know about you, it wouldn't look very good in the papers?

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DIANA: So that's it! Well, it won't work. You can't frighten me. Nothing *you* say will get into the papers. I'll see to that. Once we're off this ship, you'll be too busy trying to talk yourself out of gaol—

MIRIAM: So you're going to have me charged?

DIANA: I mightn't have done—if you hadn't come here now—telling me what you could say about me. Go on, try saying it.

MIRIAM: Listen, why don't you give me a chance? Look what a life I've had. You've had all the luck. You're alive. You'll be rescued soon. You'll get some publicity out of it—and that's what you want, isn't it?—so you'll be better off than before. Well then, leave me alone. Let me go.

DIANA: Yes—and have you trying to blackmail me in a month. You think I'm weak. Always have done. You're wrong.

MIRIAM: You won't—let it drop?

DIANA: No.

MIRIAM: Damn you! I might have known. All right. Go on. Be tough then.

VALENTINE *enters right quickly as the two women stare at one another.*

VALENTINE: Broken—and I'd say—quite deliberately. Now who on earth could have done such a damnably idiotic thing?

VALENTINE *breaks off, noticing the tenseness of the two women.*

MIRIAM, *a look of fury fixed on her face, passes him going out right. He looks after her, then looks at DIANA. He comes nearer and drops his voice.*

Diana—that maid of yours is an extraordinary woman. What a devilish look she can put on!

DIANA: Yes. And don't think she's just amusing herself pulling faces either.

VALENTINE: What have you been saying to her—to make her look like that?

DIANA: She tried to frighten me and bluff me—and she couldn't—that's all.

VALENTINE: Not being a shade too hard on her, were you, Diana?

DIANA: No, Val, and please mind your own business.

VALENTINE: Certainly not. Where did you find her?

DIANA: I took her out of a Birmingham slum, three or four years ago. We were trying out *The Octopus* there—and Agnes—you remember her?—

VALENTINE: Yes, Agnes and I had the deepest sympathy for one another—as well we might have.

DIANA: My God, you are insulting these days, Val. I can't imagine how I ever cared tuppence about you.

VALENTINE: I doubt if you did. But what about this Miriam Peck? Did Agnes suddenly walk out on you and this girl take her place?

DIANA: Yes, she'd been a programme girl or barmaid or something at the theatre, and came round and devoured me with those queer eyes of hers and said she'd always worshipped me—you know the stuff—so I took her on, let her go with me everywhere, gave her good wages and lots of things, treated her like a friend.

VALENTINE: Poor woman!

DIANA: Don't be funny! I gave her a marvellous time, and ~~and~~ after three years of it—

VALENTINE: She hates you like poison. Queer, isn't it?

DIANA: Yes, it *is* queer—queer, queer, queer—

VALENTINE: Strange, fantastic, inexplicable!

DIANA: Yes, all those things—you sneering, conceited drunk!

VALENTINE: Thanks. May I offer *lame sot* as being even stronger and shorter?

DIANA: I'm sorry. I don't know what's the matter with me.

VALENTINE: I suppose we're going to be rescued. But I doubt if we're worth it.

Enter MYRICKS from back. DIANA perks up at once.

DIANA: Mr. Myricks, are you good now at escorting females to their cabins?

MYRICKS: Miss Lismore, I do a swell job as escort. Try me. (*As she goes up to join him.*) Avon, I hope you're not going to feel too bad about this—but you see, the best man's winning.

VALENTINE: I know. I'm getting very rickety in my old age. Soon need an escort myself. Good night, Diana.

DIANA: Good night. Furious with me?

VALENTINE: No. Wish I was. I'm too far down. Just sunk. *Sunk—not drunk.*

VALENTINE turns away, to take out and light a cigarette. She looks at him a moment, then turns and smiles at MYRICKS, who is waiting for her, and goes out back with him. Left to himself, VALENTINE is now a picture of brooding, tragic misery. He leans against a table, smoking without enjoyment, staring unhappily at nothing. After a few moments, NONA enters from back, looking young and radiant.

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NONA: Hello.

VALENTINE: Hello.

NONA: Mr. Avon, you're looking terribly down.

VALENTINE: And you're looking awfully up. I believe you've just been kissed.

NONA: You're right at that. And I liked it.

VALENTINE: You make me feel about a hundred and ten.

NONA: Then it's time you were in bed. Don't you go on watch early in the morning with Frank—Mr. Jefferson?

VALENTINE: Make it Frank. Yes.

NONA: Then you ought to turn in. Frank's going to—as soon as he's talked to Boyne. Don't you feel sleepy?

VALENTINE: No. I need a drink, and I haven't got one.

NONA: I know where there's half a bottle of Scotch—if you'd like that.

VALENTINE: I should like it. Bless you!

NONA: But you've got to promise to go and rest then—so you'll be all right for your watch.

VALENTINE: It's a bargain.

Sounds of voices outside.

NONA: Come on, then.

She leads the way out. After a moment, FRANK enters, followed by BOYNE, who is half drunk. They have been talking and now continue.

FRANK: Don't give me any of your hard luck stuff, Boyne. You're just a dam' fool, and if you weren't, you wouldn't be still a deck-hand—after all your experience. Every time you might have done something for yourself, you've gone and botched it. That's what you've done now.

BOYNE: 'Ow d'you mean?

FRANK: You did a good job the night of the fire, and it might have got you somewhere. But I told you to leave that drink alone, and you wouldn't. And now you—or somebody in with you—has stolen the key, and you've got at it again. Where's that key?

BOYNE: I haven't got the key.

FRANK: Don't talk to me like that.

BOYNE: What d'yer think we're in—the *Queen Mary*?

FRANK: No, but we're in a ship, and I'm in temporary command of her—and you'll talk to me properly. Where's that key? If you haven't got it, you know who has, because you've been drinking again.

BOYNE: Me? Drinkin'? Mr. Jefferson——!

FRANK: Drop it, you big ape. Where's Ripton?

BOYNE: I dunno. An' don't call me a big ape.

FRANK: I'll call you what I like.

BOYNE: That's ri'. What *you* like! I'm not 'uman, am I—just because I haven't got a pretty little stripe on me coat——

FRANK: Oh—dry up. Did you go into the wireless room when Mr. Miles was out?

BOYNE: Me? Course not.

FRANK: One of you must have mucked about with that set——

BOYNE: It's the rats, Cap'n Jefferson. Lot o' rats still in this ship. Ought to 'ave left it, but they didn't. Rats. Rats.

FRANK: You're forgetting that the *Orsata* knows where we are. I know how to deal with people like you. I've logged you once already—and now if you don't give me that key and the liquor you've taken—you're for it.

BOYNE: I'm for it, eh, mister?

FRANK: Yes. And you may find yourself in irons in the *Orsata*. And you know what'll happen after that.

BOYNE: No, mister. I've had one packet—and I said to meself "they'll never get me again whatever I 'ave to do." Never again, never again, not for Paddy Boyne.

Door opens and RIPTON looks in cautiously. FRANK turns to glance at him, and instantly BOYNE whips a small iron bar out of his pocket and hits FRANK on the back of the head with it, knocking him out. RIPTON stares in horror at FRANK on the floor.

RIPTON: 'Ere, Boyne—for Gawd's sake—y' aven't killed 'im, have you?

BOYNE: No. Knocked 'im cold, that's all. 'Ere, Ripton. (RIPTON hesitates.) Come on. (RIPTON comes in slowly, reluctantly.) We'll 'ave to get him out of 'ere.

RIPTON: Listen, Boyne, you can't drag me into this. Pinchin' a bottle or two o' whisky is one thing—but this——

BOYNE: You're in this whether you bloody well like it or not, so you might as well put some guts into it.

A sound behind makes them turn round hastily. MIRIAM enters from the back, followed by VELBURG. The two come forward and see FRANK on the floor, and then look at BOYNE and RIPTON, who stand near, looking warily.

Well?

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MIRIAM: Started a bit early, haven't you?

BOYNE: That's the spirit. I knew you'd know how to take it, girlie. 'Ere though, what about Fritz? Who told 'im to come poking his nose in?

MIRIAM: He's all right. And they don't call him Fritz.

BOYNE: They're all Fritzes to me. And I didn't ask 'im to push his bleedin' face into this business.

MIRIAM: No, but I did.

BOYNE: Oh—you did!

MIRIAM: Yes. Wait a moment. Before you start your concert, what about getting rid of—him? (*Indicating FRANK.*)

BOYNE: You're right.

~~FRANK~~ MIRIAM: Not dead, is he?

RIPTON: No, no, no. Just knocked out—he'll come to soon. A kind of accident—it was——

MIRIAM: A kind of accident.

BOYNE: And just watch out it don't happen to you, Fritz. (*To RIPTON.*) Come on. I know where to put 'im.

BOYNE and RIPTON—the latter not doing much—carry FRANK out left. MIRIAM and VELBURG watch them steadily.

VELBURG: This is—very dangerous.

MIRIAM: Yes. It might be.

VELBURG: I have never been before—concerned—in such a thing.

MIRIAM: Been a good boy, eh?

VELBURG: Yes.

MIRIAM: And what have you got for it? All right, you needn't tell me. You've told me once. Nothing but the bird and the boot.

VELBURG: Bird and boot?

MIRIAM: They've kicked you out of everywhere, haven't they? Wouldn't let you settle down. Wouldn't leave you alone. Just because you hadn't one of their damn silly passports. And you hadn't done anybody any harm.

VELBURG: No, I have done no harm.

MIRIAM: All right then, start doing some harm, and see if that won't pay you better. You can't be any worse off, kid. You've admitted that yourself.

VELBURG: Yes—but what can I do? I—am afraid.

As he stands looking helplessly at her, she goes across and puts a hand on each of his shoulders and looks closely at him.

MIRIAM: What's your first name?

VELBURG: Carl. Or Carlo.

MIRIAM: Come on then, Carlo, give me a smile. Come on. That's better.

She suddenly leans forward and kisses him on the lips, then releases him. He looks at her wondering.

VELBURG: You kiss very well.

MIRIAM: We'll have some more later on, Carlo. But just now—it's business. Are you still frightened?

VELBURG: No.

MIRIAM: Then stick to me. And don't say too much, specially to Boyne. And don't take much notice of what I say to him. He's nothing—just useful, that's all. But you and me, Carlo, we can be friends, can't we?

VELBURG: Yes.

MIRIAM: I know I'm no beauty—I leave that to Dopy Diana out there—but looks aren't everything—and anyhow I don't look too bad, do I? You didn't mind, when I kissed you, did you?

VELBURG: It was nice. I think you would be a fine girl to love.

MIRIAM: You never said a truer thing in your life, Carlo. And you're not going to be sorry you said it. I'll look after you. Stick to me, kid, and don't say too much.

BOYNE and RIPTON return left, carrying two whisky bottles and some tin mugs.

BOYNE: Well, he's all right. Tied up and locked up. 'Ere, let's 'ave a wet. (*Pours whisky into mugs, assisted by RIPTON, and all take one.*) Fritz, see if it's all clear out there. We've more light in here than we want.

Turns lamp down.

MIRIAM: They're all in their cabins, I suppose?

BOYNE: Except the little Professor, who's on look-out. And what he'll ever see, God knows.

VELBURG returns from back.

VELBURG: There is nobody.

BOYNE: All right. Now listen, Fritz. When you got through to the *Orsata*, did you tell 'em how many people there was aboard 'ere?

VELBURG: No. The set was so bad, we only sent the S.O.S. and our position.

BOYNE: Then all the bleedin' *Orsata* knows is that there's some people 'ere?

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VELBURG: Yes. That is so.

RIPTON: What's the idea, Boyne?

BOYNE: Cripes, I picked something up when I found you, didn't I? I've only to take one crack at yer, me little Cockney rat, then—over the side—and that's the end of Mr. Snivelling little Ripton.

RIPTON: Honest, Boyne, I'm with yer, been with yer all the time. Who got yer the whisky? I wouldn't go back on yer, mate. I just wanted to know what the idea was, that's all—just asking—see?

BOYNE: All right, all right. This piece'ud make three better men than you. Look at her.

MIRIAM: But when you've done looking at me, let's get down to business.

BOYNE: Just a minute, girlie, I like you. You're all right. But ~~what's~~ what's your idea, eh?

MIRIAM: I can soon tell you that. I've been sacked. And not only that, but that dopy she-cat's going to make all the trouble she can for me, as soon as we're both off this ship. She says I left her to drown.

BOYNE: And did yer?

MIRIAM: Yes. And I wish to God I'd drowned her myself. And whatever happens I don't want to do a day's work for her and her kind again as long as I live. I'm going to strike out for myself—or finish. Now then!

BOYNE: 'Ear that, Ripton? That's the way to talk. But where does Fritz 'ere come in?

MIRIAM: He can't get a passport, so they won't let him stop anywhere.

BOYNE: Is that all, Fritz? 'Aven't you ever done anything to anybody?

VELBURG: No. I have always been good.

BOYNE: Always been good. An' I betcher 'ave too, Fritz. You look it. Aren't they a pair of "sissies"!

MIRIAM: Well, he's through with it, aren't you, kid?

VELBURG: Yes. I think I can go on no longer now.

MIRIAM: Well, that's him. And now I'll tell you where you stand, Mr. Boyne. You've just knocked out your officer. I don't know what they can do to you for that——

BOYNE: I do. But they're not going to do it, see? They're not going to take me off a derelict—after me launching boats and puttin' their fires out—just to give me two years 'ard labour. Where am I after that, eh? Worse nor I am now. Well, they're not going to do it to Paddy Boyne—see? 'Ere. I say, a man's got his rights. Let's 'ave

turn an' turn about. I've done my flamin' share, 'aven't I? Well, then, let me take a turn sittin' about with some nice clean clobber on—just ringing bells.

RIPTON: That's all right, Boyne—but—er—I don't see where it gets yer. I mean ter say, what can you do?

BOYNE: Yer mean, what can *you* do, yer narrow-gutted little twirp!

RIPTON: It's all right talking big like that, but what can yer do?

BOYNE: I'll tell yer that when I'm ready to tell yer, Ripton. But I can do a bleedin' lot, see?

MIRIAM: Now just listen to me a minute. There's two sorts o' people on this ship. There's the people who've had it all their own way up to now. Then there's people like us, who've never had a chance. What happens to us when they come and rescue us? Are we going to be petted and made a fuss of? No fear! We're going to get even worse than we've had already. And I've had enough of it. These others, the lucky ones, they don't care a damn what happens to me or any of you. Very well then, I don't care a damn what happens to them. You hear? I don't care what happens to them.

BOYNE: You've got the right ideas.

RIPTON: I don't say you're not right, miss. But it don't mean anything to me. What can you do?

MIRIAM: They don't know on the *Orsata* yet how many people there are left on this ship.

RIPTON: 'Ere—for God's sake!—

A noise at back startles them. They wait, and then the PROFESSOR enters. He is wearing a tweed hat at the back of his head and a light raincoat. He has some field-glasses round his neck, and is smoking a pipe.

PROFESSOR: Having a midnight party?

BOYNE: Just a tot before we turn in, Professor—at least afore *they* turn in, 'cos I'll be on watch with you. Seen anything, Professor?

PROFESSOR: No. But the glass is going down.

BOYNE: That's bad news, Professor. If we get a big sea, she'll shake us to bits in twelve hours. We can't dodge it—see?—and some o' them plates forrard is buckled to hell. If we're not picked up afore the sea starts on us, we're for it, Professor.

PROFESSOR: So I gather, Boyne. But I've been talking to Mr. Miles up in the wireless room—and though he's by no means an optimistic type and seems rather hysterical about the set he made being damaged—he thinks the *Orsata* ought to be here before we're in any real danger.

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BOYNE: Has he mended that set, Professor?

PROFESSOR: Not yet. And I think he'd like some assistance.

BOYNE: Certainly. Fritz, you go up to the wireless room again and see what you can do. The sooner the *Orsata* gets our SOS and position again, the better. *You* know that, don't you, Fritz?

VELBURG: Yes, of course.

BOYNE: But that's all the *Orsata* does want, y'understand that, don't yer? No time now for long fancy messages, eh?

VELBURG: No.

BOYNE: That's right. And when I'm on watch, I'll come and see how you're doing. 'Ere—(*hands VELBURG a bottle about half full of whisky*) I expect Mr. Miles could do with a drink up there. Give 'im that.

VELBURG *nods, takes the bottle, and goes out.*

Well, Professor, back on the job, eh? You might be missing something, you never know. And I'll relieve you in about half-an-hour.

PROFESSOR: All right. Or is it *Aye, aye*. I find a certain satisfaction in this look-out business, you know. Quite a new experience, and not without value.

BOYNE: That's right, Professor, and keep a sharp look-out. Lot o' funny things happen at sea—you'd be surprised.

PROFESSOR *nods, gives them a last curious look, then goes. There is complete and significant silence for a few moments.*

RIPTON: Glass is falling. If it's a sudden sharp drop we might get a big sea.

BOYNE: So I've 'eard, so I've 'eard. Aw—shut it! (*He looks at MIRIAM.*) You've got something on your mind, haven't you, girl?

MIRIAM: Yes.

BOYNE: Let's 'ave it.

MIRIAM: I was just thinking how it's a matter of luck whether you're alive or dead after one of these affairs. Some of them who were drowned the other night, I'll bet they hated dying——

RIPTON: An' I'll take my oath they did.

MIRIAM: Yet some of these people here who are expecting to be saved sometime to-morrow—the lucky ones, you'd say, they don't care whether they live or die——

RIPTON: Course they do.

BOYNE: 'Ow d'you know? You keep quiet.

MIRIAM: That old woman—Mrs. Westmoreland—she's about

finished anyhow. It'd save her a lot of trouble just to finish quietly. That Professor hasn't long to go either.

RIPTON: You'll be telling me next that little American kid's got one foot in the grave——

BOYNE: No, she's different. I could use that little piece.

MIRIAM: She's fallen for Jefferson; I've seen 'em together on deck. Make a nice couple too—damn their eyes!

BOYNE: These 'ere passengers—they're well off, aren't they?

MIRIAM: Yes, of course. They've all got money with 'em. I'll bet that American—who's been doing the cooking—has got plenty.

RIPTON: Yes, he has. Big dollar bills, not cheques—I've seen 'em.

MIRIAM: And all the women have jewellery. My beauty's got at least a thousand pounds' worth with her. I know. Now—if the luck had been the other way and anything had happened to them—*suddenly*, so they couldn't take anything with 'em—we might have collected all that lot, and could easily have hidden it among our own things when we were taken off this ship. We needn't stay on the *Orsata*, need we?

BOYNE: No, we can blow at the first port. Specially if she's calling somewhere in South America. With a few hundred quid each, we could be like princes in South America. Couldn't we, Ripton? Couldn't we?

RIPTON: Yes—but——

BOYNE: But what?

RIPTON: There's Jefferson and Miles too.

BOYNE: Well, what of it?

RIPTON: Eight of 'em altogether, eight of 'em. Gawd's trewth, Boyne, you couldn't do it. . . . And they'd all have to go. If there was just one of 'em left it'd be finish. . . . 'Ere, you don't know what you're saying. Give it up, mate.

BOYNE: Why, yer little——

MIRIAM: Just a minute! (*To RIPTON.*) You're afraid, aren't you?

RIPTON: Course I am. And who wouldn't be? Why it's proper wholesale murder.

MIRIAM: Don't frighten yourself with words. Accidents are always happening, aren't they?

RIPTON: Yes, but this wouldn't be no blinkin' accident.

MIRIAM: Yes, it would. Just another accident.

BOYNE: That's right. Just an accident. It might 'appen to you, Ripton, any minute.

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RIPTON: 'Ere—steady——

MIRIAM: Go on, nobody's going to hurt you. And who's going to know but us?

RIPTON: Yes, but *I'd* know. Every night when I got to bed and turned the light out, I'd know. I wouldn't mind taking a chance—pinching something—but this is different. Bloody murder, this is.

BOYNE: 'Ere, an' what if a few does get killed. They say it's every man for hisself, don't they? An' look at the killing that goes on! Millions of 'em in the War. An' Russia! And Germany! And China! And Spain! Killing 'em all the time.

RIPTON: That's different. . .

BOYNE: Yes, an' I'll tell you how it's different. We don't get ~~anything~~ out of it, see? An' if we're not careful, we'll find we're all getting killed for nothing, just 'cos the ruddy fools don't know how to stop it. Well then, let's have an accident or two, 'ere, an' get something out of it for once. An' don't forget we've only to-night for certain. To-morrow might be too late, an' we'll find ourselves in irons in the *Orsata*—and after that—nothing to look forward to but a year or two behind the bars and, when we do get out, walking up and down the wet streets trying to raise the price of a fourpenny kip. Use your imagination! That's your trouble. You got no imagination.

RIPTON: I got plenty. That's what's the matter with me, mate. Eight of 'em!

MIRIAM: Yes, and how many were drowned the other night, when our boat was smashed? Ten, wasn't it?

BOYNE: That's right. Ten! Gone! Finished! And why? 'Cos that flamin' ship's boat was so old an' rotten she was just stuck together with paint.. Let 'em go to hell, I say, the bleeders! They made it ten. We'll make it eight. Unless you'd like to make it nine, Ripton.

RIPTON: Oh—Jesus! Don't keep on at me. Leave me alone. . . .

While they are watching him, VALENTINE enters right. He looks rumpled, and is in pyjamas, dressing-gown, slippers. He is half-drunk.

VALENTINE: This is lucky. (*They turn and stare at him.*) There is, there is!

BOYNE: Is what?

VALENTINE: A drink. That's what I'm looking for—a drink.

MIRIAM: If you ask me, I think you've had enough already.

VALENTINE: But I'm not asking you, my dear lady. It's not a thing I'd ask any woman. They don't know, don't understand. I'm half-drunk and yet I can't sleep. One or two more and then I might stop **thinking**.

Finds a mug and holds it out unsteadily to BOYNE, who has the bottle.

MIRIAM: You'll be in the rats soon if you're not careful.

VALENTINE: The rats have been at me for years. Thank you, Commander Boyne!

BOYNE: Well—if you must have it.

Gives VALENTINE some and then pours another for himself.

MIRIAM: You see—this is one of 'em.

VALENTINE: One of what, my not very dear and most embittered young woman? One of what?

MIRIAM: One of the lucky ones. Had everything you want, from the word *go*. Think drinks and clothes and roast chickens grow on trees. Had so much, you grumble because they haven't given you the moon.

VALENTINE: Practically my own words. But don't forget, the moon's the thing. We're quite right to grumble because we haven't been given the moon. No moon, and what is it all? The drinks are just—drinks. The clothes—just something to wear. Food's just food. All routine. Pleasure's a routine just the same as duty, work—

BOYNE: Well, let me have a crack at pleasure. I know all about duty and work.

VALENTINE: Yes, my dear fellow—but you're really an innocent. You think it will be all right somewhere just round the corner, where there's more beer and women and less rail-painting and scraping. But that's where I live—round that corner—and it's nothing, just a routine. But—up—there—the moon, with her old enchantment—ah!—that's very different. So I say—with your permission—madam—give us the moon. The moon now—or nothing.

BOYNE: Cripes, I thought I'd got a load on to-night, but when I listen to you, mister, I feel stone sober.

MIRIAM: There's a ship coming as fast as she can, just to rescue you. Do you think you're worth it?

VALENTINE: Have I ever said I was? (*Stops because VELBURG enters left. VALENTINE points at him rather waveringly.*) Give this young man a drink. And look at him. Can you see anything the matter with him?

MIRIAM: No, because there isn't anything the matter with him.

VALENTINE: Yet this young man's treated as if he were a leper or a homicidal maniac. And why? Because he can't get a passport. Now I have a passport. Valentine Avon, British subject, author, age thirty-eight. Age—a thousand! And a passport to what? Nowhere I want to go, because I've been. The moon—yes, but the passport won't take

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me there. Now he'd be glad to stay anywhere—just to stay, and work and marry and bring up children and drink beer and listen to brass bands. I say, he ought to have my passport, any of our passports—and why? Justice at last. Life to those who want to live. (*Drinks.*)

MIRIAM: Well, that's you. What about the rest of you here?

VALENTINE: Except the two youngsters, Jefferson and Miss Stockton—we're all finished. We're dinosaurs and mammoths and sabretoothed tigers—done for—nearly extinct. They ought to be sending a museum for us—not a ship. Perhaps they are.

Begins laughing idiotically.

MIRIAM: Go on.

VALENTINE: Certainly not. And I consider you a most dangerous ~~woman~~. Gentlemen, I don't know anything about her, but I consider her a most dangerous woman. Earlier to-night I caught sight of an expression on her face—devilish!

MIRIAM: You're drunk.

VALENTINE: And I'll tell you a secret. I've been drunk for years. Can't stand it all, otherwise. (*Moves carefully a step or two away from them.*) Thank you, Commander Boyne, for your hospitality. I think you said I was off-duty, eh?

BOYNE: Yes, sailor. Turn in.

VALENTINE: Very soon I'll be either sick or unconscious. Touch and go—which. Good night.

VALENTINE goes out carefully right and they watch him without stirring.

MIRIAM (*pointedly to RIPTON*): You heard him? And that's what he thinks about his little lot. (*To VELBURG.*) You too, kid. Told you himself, didn't he? You're fit to live and he isn't. Didn't he say that?

RIPTON: Aw, he didn't know what he was saying.

BOYNE: But I know what I'm saying, Ripton. You're either in with us now or you're going over the side. And no more backchat.

RIPTON: I won't touch 'em——

BOYNE: Who's asking you to? All you've to do is what I tell you and keep your mouth shut. (*Sharply to VELBURG.*) Is that set fixed again?

VELBURG: No. Not yet. It will take an hour or two.

BOYNE: That's right. You go to the Professor and tell him he's relieved. I'm going on watch. Then go back to the wireless room and watch Miles. Go on, sharp to it, Fritz.

MIRIAM: Go on, kid. I'll come up there soon.

VELBURG: Very well. (*He goes out back.*)

BOYNE: I'm going to leave 'em for another hour—so's they'll be all fast asleep when we bundle 'em out. Ripton, you go along there, and see nobody's prowling about. And get some paper and straw.

RIPTON: What for?

BOYNE: 'Cos when I'm ready, I'm going to set it alight—and then tell 'em the fire's broken out again along there—and rush 'em out. Go on, Ripton. Out!

RIPTON *goes out hastily.*

MIRIAM: We mustn't give 'em time to take their things—

BOYNE: Not likely. We'll frighten them to death and then we'll rush 'em on here—and I'll tell 'em the tale. And I'll have a nice place ready for 'em—out on the fo'c'sle head. Everything's gone to hell along there—plates rotten—it'll be pitch dark and the sea's getting up.

MIRIAM: What if they won't go on there?

BOYNE: Then that's disobeying orders and just too bad, girlie. And you're going to help me to put the fear of God into 'em, when the alarm goes. Eh?

MIRIAM: You watch me.

BOYNE: That's the girl. Y'know—you an' me—we could turn a trick or two, couldn't we? (*As if going to embrace her.*)

MIRIAM (*with a slight turn, eluding him*): Yes, big boy, but let's turn this one first—and do it right—or we'll never see another. Don't forget that.

BOYNE: Me! I was born for this. Just been waiting for it all me life. Now listen, stay here till the Professor's out of the way. We don't want him seeing too much, silly as he looks. Kid him along a bit, if you like, but see he turns in before you go.

MIRIAM: All right. But he's easy. I'll—

BOYNE: Quiet. (*The PROFESSOR, dressed as before, slowly enters from back.*) Now then, Professor, did Fritz tell yer to come off duty?

PROFESSOR: Yes.

BOYNE: That's right. Done yer trick for the night now, Professor. Yer can turn in. Seen anything?

PROFESSOR: No.

BOYNE: Didn't expect yer would. But don't worry, we'll be all out o' this by morning. Just so long as the fire doesn't start again. Well, I'll go and have a dam' good look at nothing. 'Night, Professor.

PROFESSOR: Good night, Boyne. Oh—by the way—do you know where Mr. Jefferson is?

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BOYNE: Jefferson? Down in his cabin asleep—long since—~~isn't he?~~

PROFESSOR: No. I've just looked. It's empty.

BOYNE: Well, there's other cabins, y'know, Professor. Sailors **don't** care! Don't you **worry about** him. He probably wouldn't like you to.

Goes. A pause.

MIRIAM: That little American girl's taken a great fancy to Mr. Jefferson, y'know.

PROFESSOR: Yes, I understand the implication. But it's not true, because I spoke to Miss Stockton not ten minutes ago. She couldn't go to sleep, so came out on deck.

MIRIAM: Well, she's not the only one here. I know another beauty. Know her only too well. Better not be too curious, Professor. It doesn't always pay.

PROFESSOR: It pays me. It's really my profession, y'know. A kind of curiosity. Not quite this scandalous kind, perhaps. But I've never thought the antics of the sexes very interesting. Monotonous, y'know, once you're fully adult yourself. Don't let me keep you, Miss—er—Pick—isn't it?

MIRIAM: I'm not sleepy.

PROFESSOR: No, neither am I. (*A pause.*) I can't help wondering about that unfortunate young man who can't get a passport.

MIRIAM: What about him?

PROFESSOR: I'm wondering why—after giving me Boyne's message—he should go to the top deck—and suddenly begin crying.

MIRIAM: Crying? He wasn't.

PROFESSOR: I distinctly heard him as I came down. Some curious failure of nerve, probably due to a long-established feeling of persecution. He was crying most bitterly.

MIRIAM: Poor kid!

She hurries out back. He watches her go, then turns and looks meditatively at the bottle and mugs. Then he reflects a moment and goes up to the rail and looks about carefully. He waits a moment, then takes a torch out of his pocket and slowly goes through the doorway left, with the torch flashing before him.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE II

The curtain rises almost immediately on the same scene, later that night. Whisky bottle and mugs have been cleared away. BOYNE is discovered standing at back, a little to the left of centre. He is holding a short iron bar, and is a ferocious commanding figure, looking rather wild and dishevelled. MYRICKS, NONA, and VALENTINE are lined up a little upstage from door right which is open. A few wisps of smoke are coming from this doorway. The three of them look as if they have been suddenly roused from sleep and are not properly dressed. There is an atmosphere of great tension.

BOYNE (*stepping forward, to shout across through doorway right*): Come on, look slippy, can't yer. We haven't all night.

MYRICKS: Can't we put the fire out?

BOYNE: Not with you people running about. I got to get you lot out o' the way first. Come on with them other two.

NONA: Where's Frank Jefferson?

BOYNE: He's all right. Don't you bother about him.

NONA: Yes, but where is he?

BOYNE: Will yer shut yer mouth a minute, or do I 'ave to make yer shut up, eh?

MRS. WESTMORELAND *comes in right as if suddenly awakened.*

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Is the ship really on fire again?

BOYNE: Oh no—missis—we're just having a little smoking concert—for the benefit o' seamen's charities. Stand over there.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Why isn't Mr. Jefferson in charge?

BOYNE: 'Cos *he* isn't here, and I am—see?

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Yes, but—

BOYNE: Oh—shut it—can't yer? Come on with that other one. What the hell's the matter with 'er?

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I don't like this.

VALENTINE: No, not very enjoyable, is it?

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I don't mean that. I mean, there's something wrong about this.

BOYNE: There'll be something a lot more wrong with it, if you don't

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keep quiet, old party. Fire's broken out again—amidships—and the sea's getting up—and you go squawking and arguing as if you're at a tea party. Keep quiet and do as you're told.

Sounds of voices—DIANA'S and MIRIAM'S—through doorway right and some scuffling.

MIRIAM (*off right, loudly*): And I tell you—you can't get your things—

DIANA (*off, almost screaming*): I suppose you'd like them—

BOYNE (*shouting*): Shove 'er in 'ere. An' if there's any more trouble with 'er, I'll knock 'er on the head. Come on.

MIRIAM, *who is dressed as in Scene I, pushes DIANA, who is wearing a wrap as if just hustled out of bed, in through the doorway right, and follows her in.*

DIANA: Don't tell me you're trying to save my life—when only two days ago you left me to drown—

BOYNE: Come on, you. Stand there, an' keep quiet. Think we've nothing else to do but listen to you, Greta Garbo? Now shut up, the lot of yer, an' let me talk. (*Quietly, to MIRIAM.*) Where's Ripton?

MIRIAM: I don't know. Gone to look for the Professor, I think.

BOYNE: I'd forgotten the Professor.

NONA: Where's Frank Jefferson?

BOYNE: Are *you* starting again?

NONA: I want to know where he is.

BOYNE: He's hurt himself—so I'm in charge—and don't forget it—

NONA: Hurt himself?

BOYNE: Yes—an' you're going to hurt *yourself* if yer don't keep quiet—see, kid? (*Suddenly grasps her arm.*)

NONA: Let me go. Uncle!

MYRICKS, *at this appeal, tries to intervene, but BOYNE, still holding NONA, shoves him back with his other hand, the one still holding the bar.*

BOYNE (*pulling NONA easily across and then almost throwing her back behind him*): You go there—and stay there—till I tell yer to move.

MIRIAM: Boyne, you know what I told you—about this girl. . . . You can't get away with it.

BOYNE: I know, I know. (*Looks at the rest.*) Now listen. You see what's happened? Fire's broken out again, sea's getting up—

MRS. WESTMORELAND: There's something wrong with all this. Mr. Avon, why don't you do something?

VALENTINE (*coming forward*): Just a minute, Boyne.

BOYNE: Just a minute nothing. (*Steps forward, puts a hand on VALENTINE's face and pushes him back sharply.*) Now another word from any one of yer—an' I don't care which it is, man or woman—an' I lay yer flat with this. 'Cos yer've 'ad it easy all yer life and you're passengers, yer think yer've nothing to do but scream and argue. (RIPTON, *looking troubled, enters from back.* BOYNE *turns.*) Found 'im?

RIPTON: Found who?

BOYNE: Professor.

RIPTON: No. I wasn't looking for him.

BOYNE: You be careful. (*Addresses passengers again, in another tone.*) So—as I said—I've got to put you all in a nice safe place—where you won't come to no harm——

RIPTON: No, don't go! It's—murder. . . .

BOYNE: Ye bleedin' little rat!

He jumps forward, and knocks out RIPTON. There is a startled cry from the passengers, a scream from DIANA.

MIRIAM: Oh—be quiet—you!

BOYNE: Clean off his nut, that Ripton. Lost his nerve, see? That's what happens. Anybody else going the same way 'ud better speak up now.

The PROFESSOR enters left, dressed exactly as in Scene I, and keeping his hands in the pockets of his raincoat.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Professor Pawlet——

BOYNE: Shut up. Come on, Professor, if yer don't want ter do us all in.

PROFESSOR: Boyne——

BOYNE: Don't you start now! Get up there.

PROFESSOR: Just listen a moment, Boyne. (BOYNE *makes a move towards him.*) I said, listen! I am sorry for you, Boyne. It is our fault—I mean, the fault of our society—and not really your fault. You are what we've made you. We have no right to expect anything better. Though I must condemn you, I don't blame you. I am truly sorry. And if we live, we must change this society of ours. We must condemn and execute that, so that these things cannot happen again. Patrick Boyne—say *God have mercy upon me.*

BOYNE (*wondering, awed, deeply uneasy*): God have mercy upon me. (*Then with growing suspicion and anger.*) 'Ere, what is all this? What are yer trying on?

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PROFESSOR: I'm sorry, Boyne.

BOYNE: Sorry me——!

He lifts his iron bar and is about to jump across at the PROFESSOR, who pulls a revolver out of his overcoat pocket and fires almost point-blank at BOYNE, who falls, shudders, and is still. There is a terrible scream—of despair rather than fright—from MIRIAM. The PROFESSOR looks down sadly at BOYNE.

PROFESSOR: And God have mercy upon us all.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

About two hours later. Lighting as before. BOYNE's body not visible now. PROFESSOR and FRANK discovered. Latter looks as if he had been knocked about. His head is roughly bound in handkerchief. PROFESSOR is smoking his pipe and now holds out a match for FRANK's cigarette.

FRANK: Yes, but they were all in it, y'know, sir.

PROFESSOR: No, not really. Ripton says he was bullied into pretending to help them, and, after all, he got himself knocked out shouting a warning. Velburg played no active part in it. As for that woman——

FRANK: You're not going to tell me, sir, *she* didn't know all about it.

PROFESSOR: I think it was probably her idea. I thought from the first that young woman had a very dangerous look. She's an Old Testament character.

FRANK: Well then, what are we going to do with her?

PROFESSOR: Try the New Testament on her.

FRANK: You'd let off the three of them?

PROFESSOR: Yes. Pardon's the word for all. You seem surprised.

FRANK: I am, sir. I don't understand you, Professor. You don't want anything to happen to these three, yet you didn't hesitate to shoot Boyne.

PROFESSOR: True. Boyne had to be killed, y'know. We could never have done anything with him. There's something to be said for this method. It's the revolutionary style of dealing with criminals. Either you are sudden, sharp, quite merciless—or you are free-and-easy and let 'em go. An old society, with its elaborate codes and punishment, only succeeds in making life enemies of its delinquents. It's *much* more inhuman really.

FRANK: I can't see that.

PROFESSOR: Think it over. I'm going to let the woman out, but I shan't tell her yet that she's been forgiven.

Goes out. FRANK, who is still unsteady from his crack on the head, goes up carefully towards door at back, to look out, but obviously doesn't feel up to it and comes back to lean against a table.

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DIANA, now lightly dressed and looking very attractive, enters.

FRANK, who has not noticed her entrance, gives a slight groan.

DIANA: You poor boy! Does it still hurt?

FRANK: I'm afraid it does a bit, thanks, Miss Lismore.

DIANA: That hasn't been properly attended to yet, y'know.

FRANK: No—but—you see—Nona Stockton offered to do it—but I said—it didn't matter yet——

DIANA: Oh—but *of course* it matters. We're all depending on you. And you should come first.

FRANK: Oh—it isn't so bad, thanks. And, you see, as everybody was awake—and we could all do with some hot coffee and food after the excitement, I told Nona—Miss Stockton—to go and help her uncle in the pantry——

DIANA: Yes, of course—but you must let me look after you. (*Puts a hand on his shoulder and looks down at him, rather seductively.*) I'm not quite useless, y'know—and I can't have you thinking I am. I know I could make you much more comfortable. I have some liniment in my cabin that would help to stop the ache—and you could take one of my tablets. I'm so terrified of pain that I always have plenty of things to stop it. Now——

FRANK: Well—it's very decent of you, Miss Lismore—but I couldn't think of——

DIANA: Please. Just for my sake. I've felt so useless, so far—and that's very bad for me. I get depressed, and you wouldn't want me to feel depressed would you? (*She puts a hand on his arm, and he rises, still uneasy. Sound of voices—the PROFESSOR'S and MIRIAM'S, off left.*) People coming. Let's hurry. It's very bad for you to have people worrying you.

She leads him out. MIRIAM enters, looking a tragic figure, and the

PROFESSOR follows. They are talking as they enter.

MIRIAM: What's the use of talking?

PROFESSOR: Don't say that. I earn my living by talking.

MIRIAM: Yes, and you've been lucky. What do you know about life? Colleges and all that. *You* weren't brought up in a slum.

PROFESSOR: I was. In Salford. Back-to-back houses. And it was worse in my time than in yours.

MIRIAM: Anyhow, *you* got out of it.

PROFESSOR: So did you. And haven't you been all over the place with your mistress? California, too. What more do you want? Young woman, there's a lot wrong here—(*he makes a wide circle*)—in the world, outside ourselves. But don't forget there can still be things

wrong here—(he taps his forehead, then his heart)—inside ourselves. That's where the devils and the witches live now.

MIRIAM: You're not so bad—the best of this lot.

PROFESSOR: And *you* were the best of your little lot.

MIRIAM: I'm not sorry, y'know. I don't care a damn, do you hear?

MILES puts his head in. He is very excited.

MILES: The *Orsata's* quite near. Tell Jefferson. The set's working and I'm getting messages all the time. Ask 'em to bring me some coffee.

He disappears.

PROFESSOR: That's good news.

MIRIAM: For you, not for me.

PROFESSOR: Did you ever read or see *Macbeth*?

MIRIAM: No.

PROFESSOR: You ought to try it.

VELBURG enters at back and stands looking at them uncertainly.

MIRIAM sees him and suddenly lights up.

MIRIAM: You all right, kid?

VELBURG: I am not hurt. But I feel bad.

MIRIAM: Come on, Carlo, give me a smile. (As VELBURG shakes his head miserably) Come on now. (She smiles at him and finally he smiles back at her.) That's better.

VELBURG: Not very much better, I think.

As they look at one another, and the PROFESSOR observes them curiously, MYRICKS looks in at the door right.

MYRICKS: Come and get it, folks. Hot coffee—and scrambled eggs mother used to make.

PROFESSOR: Miles says the *Orsata's* quite near and he's getting messages all the time. And he wants some coffee up there.

MYRICKS: Fine! I'll pass the word along. Well, come and get it.

Withdraws. The PROFESSOR looks at the other two, who have shown no interest.

PROFESSOR: You'd better come and have something to eat and drink, y'know.

MIRIAM: I couldn't touch it. You have some, Carlo.

VELBURG shakes his head, PROFESSOR gives them another look, then goes off briskly right. VELBURG comes forward slowly and sits down, looking miserable and shaken.

VELBURG: It is no use. Nobody will ever give me a passport now. I

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will never have a country . . . only more and more prison . . . and then put on ships again. . . .

MIRIAM: You're not going to cry, are you, Carlo?

VELBURG: No.

MIRIAM: Don't you. It's not worth it, none of it—what we've had and haven't got any more, what we've missed—none of it. Is it?

VELBURG: I don't know.

MIRIAM: Oh—kid! (*She stands above him and takes his head in her hands, bending it back to her breast, leans forward and kisses him, then holds his head on her breast, all with great tenderness as well as passion.*) Could you have loved me?

VELBURG: Yes—I think so.

MIRIAM: Yes, I know you could. I know I could have made you—even though you didn't care much at first. So long as I had you to myself. You like me, don't you?

VELBURG: Yes. You are strong and kind.

MIRIAM: Then you'd have loved me—afterwards, I know you would.

VELBURG: Yes. Though there was a girl——

MIRIAM: Don't tell me. Pretend to yourself I'm that girl, if you like, only don't tell me.

She clasps him to her closely, and they remain like that for a moment, then he slowly releases himself.

VELBURG: What will they do to you—do you know?

MIRIAM: Oh—I'm for it now all right.

VELBURG: What do you think happens to you—when you are dead?

MIRIAM: Now, I've thought about that. Sometimes I think you're just snuffed out—y'know, fall asleep and never wake up. And that's what I usually think. But sometimes I've thought you might walk straight into another sort of life, like this—with people and houses and all that—but different, like it is when you dream sometimes.

VELBURG: I would not mind that—just to sleep—or a different kind of life. But what God is waiting there, as the priest says? Perhaps they will ask me for my passport all over again.

MIRIAM: Not they! If there is angels and that, they'd have more sense. But there isn't, y'know. All made up, that. Just to keep you quiet and take your money. Don't you worry, kid. It's either a long sleep or a different, better life, where some don't get all the bad luck. (*Pauses, then softly*) Why did you ask?

VELBURG: I was—thinking.

MIRIAM: I'll go, Carlo, if you will. I couldn't go by myself and I don't suppose you could—could you?

VELBURG: No, I am afraid—afraid!

MIRIAM: But two of us together—my arms around you—and I wouldn't leave go—and it 'ud be all right. Can you swim?

VELBURG: Not much.

MIRIAM: I can't at all. So it couldn't last long. And we'd be together. If there wasn't anything else, we'd never know, and if there was—y'know, another sort of life—we'd start it together——

VELBURG: No, I'm afraid.

MIRIAM: You've got much more to be frightened of, if we don't. There'll be prison again, more of it this time, and then what?

VELBURG: You need not tell me——

MIRIAM: Why should we let 'em have the laugh of us? Let's get out and stay out, so they can't touch us. In a few hours, we might never have another chance to be together, and then we'll wish we'd finished it now. Here—*(she raises him to his feet)*—now put your arms round me—tight. *(He puts his arms round her and she clasps him closely and kisses him. Then)*: You're not afraid now, are you?

VELBURG: No.

MIRIAM: Let's go then, and go for good. I'll see nothing hurts you, boy, and it'll soon be all over.

VELBURG: All right.

As they are looking at one another, and she is smiling at him tenderly, RIPTON enters right. MIRIAM turns to look at him.

MIRIAM: Well?

RIPTON: 'Ere, I wanted to 'ave a word with you two.

MIRIAM: There's not much time. What have you to say?

RIPTON: Well, I just wanted to 'ave a word or two.

MIRIAM: Have you found a passport for him?

RIPTON: No, of course I 'aven't. 'Ow could I?

MIRIAM: Perhaps you know where there's a fine new life for us, eh? With no more prison, no more insults, no more ordering about all day and all night, and everything different and better than it is now, eh?

RIPTON: No, of course not. What d'you take me for? An' what's the idea, any'ow?

MIRIAM: Will you do something for me?

RIPTON: Depends. What is it?

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

MIRIAM: Take a message from me to Diana Lismore, and give it to her when she's by herself. Tell her I'm sorry for her now, because this minute I'm what she'll never be again—I'm happy and content. And tell her——

RIPTON: 'Ere, steady on, what's all this?

MIRIAM: Tell her I'm going where she daren't go. And I'm glad to go, and sorry for her.

RIPTON: I'll never remember all that.

MIRIAM: You'll remember it the rest of your life. (*She turns away and goes close to VELBURG.*) Is it all right, Car'lo?

VELBURG: I am afraid.

MIRIAM: Why, there's nothing to be afraid of. There's nothing to be afraid of ever again. I *am* happy and content. It's true, it's true. I knew there was something I was meant to do—in the end. Everything's always pointed to this, all my life. Whether you come with me or not, *I'm* going now.

RIPTON: Going where—for Gawd's sake?

MIRIAM: Where the rats can't get at me. (*Turns to VELBURG.*) Are you coming with me, kid? I'll hold you close. You won't be afraid.

She looks at him tenderly and kisses him.

VELBURG: But—your eyes are so bright . . . and you look . . . oh! . . . I think now you are beautiful.

MIRIAM: Then we'll go now.

They go off entwined, while RIPTON, who is not too bright after the bang he got in the last scene, gapes after them, completely bewildered. After a moment, he realises what is happening.

RIPTON: 'Ere! Hi! For Gawd's sake! (*Then he runs out at the back and we hear him shouting.*) Mr. Jefferson! Mr. Jefferson!

DIANA enters right with FRANK. She is clearly doing everything she can to attract him.

DIANA: Come and sit down.

RIPTON enters from the back.

RIPTON: Mr. Jefferson!

FRANK: I'd better go and see what's happening.

RIPTON: Mr. Jefferson!

DIANA: Why should you? You've done quite enough for these ridiculous people.

RIPTON: Mr. Jefferson! Mr. Jefferson!

FRANK: I'm afraid I must go.

DIANA *stands aside to let JEFFERSON go out back with RIPTON. DIANA moves slowly up after him, but is stopped by NONA, who enters quickly.*

NONA: Just a minute. I want to talk to you.

DIANA *stops. The two eye one another.*

DIANA: Yes, but I'm not sure I want to listen.

NONA: You're going to listen whether you want to or not.

DIANA: Really!

NONA: Really nothing. You needn't put on that Mayfair Dowager act with me because it won't get across. You—you man-stealer!

DIANA: Aren't you being very silly and offensive?

NONA: Yes, I expect I am. I wouldn't be surprised at all how silly and offensive I'm being. But that's not going to stop me telling you the truth. You see, I love Frank Jefferson, and he loves me. As soon as I can marry him, I'm going to.

DIANA: And what do I do—congratulate you?

NONA: No, what you do is to keep out of it. Do you think I don't know what you've been trying to do to-night? I suppose you imagine I'm jealous?

DIANA: Yes. Aren't you?

NONA: I am a bit—at that. Any girl would be. But that's not the point.

DIANA: It sounds like it.

NONA: Well, it isn't. The point is, I'm not going to stand by and watch you brushing up your technique on my young man. I don't think it's come to much so far—and I'll see it doesn't—but even if it had, I wouldn't blame him, I'd blame you. For an old hand like you, it'd be money for nothing with a boy who's hardly been allowed off his ship yet. Like taking a nickel from a baby!

DIANA: I've not the least desire to listen to any more of this—do you mind?

NONA: But I haven't finished yet. And if you think you're going to duck the rest of it by going out there, you're wrong, because I'll follow you out there and tell you the rest at the top of my voice. They can hear it. I don't give a damn, because this is important to me. So are you going to stay here and listen or take it out there?

DIANA *does not reply but turns and comes down a little and sits.*

NONA: Just remember, this isn't the stage or motion pictures, it's real life. You're not dealing now with phoney *glamour* and *passion*, but with the feelings of real people, who can be hurt like hell. And

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you're not going to try and bust up my life and Frank's, just to pass a few hours, and get away with it. I want Frank—and I know we can be happy together in our own way—and no faded old glamour-girl——

DIANA: My God—you *are* a little swine.

NONA: No, I'm not. I admired you once—and I was ready to be friendly—I was friendly—until you started this little game to-night. Just to amuse yourself. What do *you* care about him? What do *you* care about anybody but yourself?

DIANA: You know nothing whatever about me.

NONA: I know this—that if there was ever a world where women like you really meant anything—except as little bits of decoration—it's finished now. You're out, and we're in. I don't think even on the stage and in motion pictures we'll want women like you any more. Frank and I are going to have to live in a world where you don't sit round being glamorous and taking all you can get, but where you have to work and bring up children and get along with your neighbours. When I'm your age, I don't expect I'll look like you—I shan't have had the time and money to doll myself up as you've done—but at least I'll be somebody, somebody real and strong and useful—and not just a——

DIANA: Stop it! You've said quite enough. You've taken care to tell me how much older I am than you—it's true, of course—well, let me ask you now to stop insulting a woman so much older than yourself. It looks as if this new world of yours is going to be chiefly distinguished for its bad manners. And by the time you're my age—and that won't be long, though you think it will—you may realise then how hard and cruel the youngest generation can be, and perhaps you'll remember this conversation. Please go now.

NONA: All right. I didn't mean——

DIANA: I don't care what you meant.

NONA: Okay.

MRS. WESTMORELAND, *now fully dressed, enters briskly. She is carrying a piece of paper, and is in great spirits.*

MRS. WESTMORELAND: I looked in at the wireless operator and that very minute he was taking down a message for me that had been sent to this ship—of course we hadn't got it, but the *Orsata* had picked it up—she's very near now, by the way—and had managed to give it to our wireless officer—to tell me that my second girl Rhoda—she lives at Oxford, her husband's a don there—has a boy—which is all very comforting—though I don't know that I was very much worried about Rhoda—strong as a horse really——

She goes out with NONA. After a few moments, RIPTON looks in at the back, and then comes slowly forward.

RIPTON: Miss Lismore! (*As DIANA ignores him, coming forward again*) She told me to give it to you when you were by yourself, see? (*She merely makes an impatient movement, as if to wave him away.*) Yes, but—she's gone, y'know.

DIANA: Why are you worrying me now? What is it?

RIPTON: That Miriam. She's gone, y'know.

DIANA: You mean—— She committed suicide?

RIPTON: Yerss. Jumped into the sea with that Velburg. Proper suicide pact, it was. I come in 'ere, and there they was, the pair of 'em——

DIANA: Yes, but what was it you said? About giving me something?

RIPTON: That's right. A message. An' I said "I'll never remember all that" an' she says, giving me an awful look, "You'll remember it the rest of your life." She knew all right.

DIANA: Oh—don't go on and on. I don't think I want to hear it anyway.

RIPTON: Oh! but—I must tell yer, I promised, see? And she's gone—— She said: "Tell her I'm sorry for her now because this minute I'm what she'll never be again—I'm happy an' content" she says. Then she says: "Tell 'er I'm going where she daren't go. An' I'm glad to go," she says, "and sorry for her." That's it. 'Ave you got it?

DIANA now deeply distressed, waves him away. He waits a moment, then goes out right. She begins to sob, not noisily but with a suggestion of tearing force, wringing her hands. She chokes back a final sob, then slowly opens her bag and takes out a tiny gold case. She looks at it, and finally shakes out on to her palm some small white tablets, and as she looks at these, VALENTINE enters at back.

VALENTINE (*coming down*): Diana. Mrs. Westmoreland said—— (*He notices what she is doing, and hurriedly limps towards her.*) What are you doing? (*He knocks her hand up so that the tablets are spilt. She springs up in a tearful fury, trying to hit him.*

DIANA: You damned fool! They were all I had. (*He seizes her hands, holding them while she struggles.* Let me go—let me go.

VALENTINE (*holding her hands*): Quiet now, Diana. Quiet. Quiet. (*She stops struggling, and he pushed her gently back into her chair. She buries her face in her hands.*) What's the matter? Tell me, Diana. Then you'll feel better. Was it because of that maid of yours ~~that~~ *He finds one*

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

of the tablets on the table, picks it up and examines it curiously but distastefully.) What's this stuff? Is it that stuff you doped yourself with when you came on board?

DIANA: Yes.

VALENTINE: And you were just going to take some more, eh?

DIANA: If you want to know, I was just going to take the lot.

VALENTINE: Why?

DIANA: I feel I'm through with everything. I can't explain, can't talk about it.

VALENTINE: You'd better tell me.

DIANA: I can't. And what's the use?

VALENTINE (*quietly, after a pause*): Diana! You wouldn't like to help *me*, would you?

DIANA: What do you mean?

VALENTINE: I feel like death.

DIANA: That's a hang-over. I suppose you were tight again last night.

VALENTINE: Yes, I gather I was. And what a time to choose! We were all nearly for it, y'know. It was touch and go. I was tight—and Ripton says I wandered in here and told Boyne we weren't worth saving, and he took me at my word. That was *my* contribution to this adventure. A very fine fellow I am.

DIANA: We're a bright pair. We weren't like that—before—were we?

VALENTINE: No, only half-way—or rather more than half-way—towards what we are now. But it was all waiting for us. You wanted more and more sensations. I was afraid of reality, afraid of my own sober thoughts.

DIANA: I know what you mean. Oh!—Val—how can I help you or anyone else? I can't even help myself.

VALENTINE: Don't try to help yourself. Help me. I need it. I'm down. You may feel better when we get on the *Orsata*. But I shan't, I shall feel worse.

DIANA: You did love me once, didn't you? Don't tell me now that that was unreal too?

VALENTINE: No, it was as real as anything could be that happened to me.

DIANA: That doesn't sound very convincing.

VALENTINE: I'm not trying to please you now, Diana. I'm trying to talk (

DIANA: But I'm a woman—and terribly unhappy—and I don't know that I want cold truth. . . . Is it true that everything's changing, that we'll soon be in a different kind of world that won't want us—at least me—all ungracious and busy and hard—like—like so many of the boys and girls one meets nowadays?

VALENTINE: I've said something like that to you myself, Diana, almost thrown it in your face, but when you say it, something—I don't know what it is—a deep fellow-feeling—affection—perhaps real love—begins to stir in me. I'm all on your side, and I want to say "Damn your new world, this is mine." Meaning—you.

DIANA: I suppose I'm not very much good really now. I was once, but somehow I've changed. It's terrible when you suddenly wake up and see how much you must have changed. And yet—inside—you feel the same. I can't help you, can I? You said that just to try to comfort me, didn't you? You're very sweet really, Val.

VALENTINE: No, I meant it. I'm right down, Diana, and I've been down some time, and I know I can't get up again by myself. I'm not strong enough, not hopeful enough—it's too much for me.

DIANA: But I'm down too—much further than you. God knows what might have happened to me in another minute, if you hadn't come in! What's the use of somebody as weak as that, to you or anybody else?

VALENTINE: But don't you see—that's the very point. We can help each other. Just because we know we're weak and a bit unreal and rather hopeless. Other people would never understand and give it up. But you and I—we know. Diana, help me. I'll help you. We'll start again together.

DIANA: We could, I suppose. But—what as?

VALENTINE: Anything you like. Friends. Lovers. Husband and wife—no, that's not possible—you're still——

DIANA: No, I've been free for the last two years.

VALENTINE: You kept it very quiet.

DIANA: Yes. . . . Well?

VALENTINE: Diana, I'm crocked, and I drink like a fish. My work's bad and I no longer believe in it, and I haven't much money left. Will you marry me?

DIANA: Val, I'm broke. I can't get decent parts any longer. I'm as irritable as the devil, and I've got some of the worst habits any woman could possibly have. I'm extravagant and idiotic, and I can't cook, mend, or do anything useful. And I will, God help you! *(They kiss. She smiles at him a moment.)* Pick up those tablets, darling. They cost me the earth and I don't know where I'll get any more.

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VALENTINE: No. (*He crunches them with his foot.*)

DIANA: Val!

VALENTINE: Well?

DIANA: I'll try, honestly I will, darling. But God help the first whisky bottle I catch near you.

MYRICKS *enters, with a piece of paper in his hand.*

MYRICKS: This is a laugh! I got a cable about United Utilities. . . . Say, what's happened to you two?

DIANA: We've gone mad.

MYRICKS: Keep right on! You're doing fine!

VALENTINE: Never mind about us. Tell us about yourself and United Utilities. Are you a multi-millionaire—or are you broke?

MYRICKS (*chuckling*): Well, what do you think?

DIANA: Multi-millionaire.

MYRICKS (*chuckling harder than ever*): Wrong. I'm broke. Listen to this:—*All in the red stop and what haven't they done to that stock stop Charlie and Rubens have ducked it probably Mexico stop keep out of New York unless you've learnt to play the ukulele and can come back as four Hawaiians.*

He roars with laughter, and, after a brief moment of bewilderment, DIANA and VALENTINE begin laughing too.

VALENTINE: But does that mean you're broke?

MYRICKS: Completely busted . . . and I haven't got one red cent left in New York State. . . . I'll bet they're selling my golf clubs to pay taxes right now . . . and all I've got left is what I have with me—about seven hundred dollars—and a thousand dollars I left in a bank in San Francisco—

VALENTINE: Seventeen hundred dollars? Could you start another financial career on that?

MYRICKS: I could, but I'm not going to. I'm going out West, to cook. Why should I spend the rest of my life selling stock to people I don't like, when I could be dishing up ham and eggs to folk I do like? I've worried about the market for thirty years. Let somebody else do the worrying now. You won't catch me even reading the papers—

A siren sounds faintly. RIPTON enters at the back, very excited.

RIPTON: Oy, oy! She's there.

VALENTINE: What—the *Orsata*?

RIPTON: Yes. Listen! *They listen, and then, after a moment, we hear again, from far away, the sound of a siren.*) That's 'er, that's 'er, all right.

VALENTINE: There!

NONA (*appearing at the back, excitedly*): Uncle, we're going to send off a rocket. Gosh—I think this is *grand*!

She and RIPTON go to the rail. MYRICKS, followed by DIANA and VALENTINE, move up towards them. MRS. WESTMORELAND and the PROFESSOR enter. The PROFESSOR is carrying his manuscript.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Did I hear somebody say the *Orsata's* here?

MYRICKS: Yes. We're sending up a rocket.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Oh—I *adore* rockets.

A rushing sound outside.

MYRICKS: There she goes!

A sudden red-and-white glare outside, which quickly fades.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Oh!—I've seen much better rockets. What's the matter, Professor Pawlet?

PROFESSOR (*exhibiting MS.*): This work has been my companion now for the last five years, and I am no longer young.

DIANA (*with comic dismay*): You're not going to read it to us, are you?

PROFESSOR (*sadly*): No, I've just discovered something about it. After these last two or three days with you, I've suddenly discovered—I saw it quite clearly not half an hour ago—that this isn't true. I don't know yet what is true—but, by Heaven, I know this is not. If I take it with me to the *Orsata*—I believe I shall never have the courage to destroy it.

A faint hail "Zillah, ahoy!" off. FRANK and NONA come hurrying into sight at the back.

FRANK (*shouting*): *Orsata*, ahoy! (*To the others.*) It's the boat from the *Orsata*.

DIANA: We're saved.

They are all crowding along the rail, looking down and off, except PROFESSOR, who is still sitting with his MS., and MRS. WESTMORELAND, who is standing near him. PROFESSOR begins tearing his MS.

MRS. WESTMORELAND: Why—Professor Pawlet——?

PROFESSOR: Yes, we owe thanks to God for our deliverance and His mercy. (*Gives her some sheets to tear.*) And there are worse ways of praising Him.

He tears and she begins to tear, while the others look at the approaching boat. The sky beyond is now red with dawn and some light from the water catches the faces of those at the back.

END OF PLAY

THEY CAME TO A CITY

A Play in Two Acts

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NOTE ON THE SET

This can be more or less elaborate according to the resources of the theatre, but the following features are essential. On the Right (actors') a tower that is part of the city wall, and set in the face of this tower is a large practicable door, as strongly made as possible, that opens inward, with the hinges upstage. Then running across the stage from this tower is a wall that must have broad steps in front of it, with, if possible, a look-out alcove and then a walk that goes off Left. There is also a downstage exit Left in front of the steps. There should be a small seat downstage Left and if possible a place to stand on the level of the top step, above this seat. Behind the wall, to represent the sky, should be a cyclorama, as big and as far back as possible. The tower, the steps, the wall, any seats or parapets, should appear to be made of the same material—stone, concrete, rough-cast, adobe, etc. The door suggests heavy plastic with a bronze tinge.

The lighting, which moves from early dawn to full daylight and then through sunset to dusk, should be as varied as possible. The sky should be grey, intense blue, and finally purple. Bright sunlight streams through the doorway, once the door is opened. In the last scene of the play, there is only a glimmer of daylight remaining, and Joe and Alice play in a spotlight.

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CHARACTERS

JOE DINMORE
MALCOLM STRITTON
CUDWORTH
SIR GEORGE GEDNEY
ALICE FOSTER
PHILIPPA LOXFIELD
LADY LOXFIELD
DOROTHY STRITTON
MRS. BATLEY

The action takes place during one day outside a strange city.

They Came to a City—Copyright, 1950, by J. B. Priestley

“They Came to a City” was first produced in London at The Globe Theatre, in April, 1943, with the following cast:

JOE DINMORE	JOHN CLEMENTS
MALCOLM STRITTON	RAYMOND HUNTLEY
CUDWORTH	NORMAN SHELLEY
SIR GEORGE GEDNEY	A. E. MATTHEWS
ALICE FOSTER	GOOGIE WITHERS
PHILIPPA LOXFIELD	FRANCES ROWE
LADY LOXFIELD	MABEL TERRY LEWIS
DOROTHY STRITTON	RENÉE GADD
MRS. BATLEY	ADA REEVE

The play produced by IRENE HENTSCHEL

ACT I

Curtain rises in complete darkness. Then LADY LOXFIELD is seen, in a spotlight. She is a handsome dignified woman in her late fifties, not without a certain graciousness, though we hardly ever see her at her best. She must have the voice of her class.

LADY L. (*turning to call*): Philippa! Philippa! (*She waits for a reply. Then with sudden urgency*) Philippa!

PHIL. (*unseen yet*): Yes, Mother. I'm coming.

LADY L. (*impatiently*): Well, where are you? Really, Philippa, how can you leave me alone—at a moment like this—when *anything* might happen—I can't imagine.

PHILIPPA has now come into the spot, and they stand together. She is in her late twenties, a girl of no particular charm and appeal, but with more sense and character than would first appear. Both women are in ordinary walking dress.

PHIL. (*with weary patience*): But I wasn't leaving you alone, Mother. I was only just behind you. I stopped because I thought I heard somebody else moving about.

LADY L.: All the more reason why you shouldn't leave me. We must stick together.

PHIL. (*same tone*): Yes, Mother.

LADY L.: Can you still hear somebody?

PHIL.: No, not now.

LADY L.: Where are we?

PHIL.: I haven't the foggiest.

LADY L.: You haven't any idea?

PHIL.: No. All I know is that we're no longer in that **beastly** hotel in Bournequay—thank the Lord! (*After pause.*) Perhaps **we're dead**.

LADY L.: Philippa, don't be ridiculous.

PHIL.: Well, Mother, think it over. The last thing I remember was that horrible geyser going off with the most frightful bang—

LADY L.: I thought it was a bomb.

PHIL.: No, it was the geyser.

LADY L.: I shall make a serious complaint to the manageress.

PHIL.: You'll have to find her first, won't you?

LADY L.: Philippa, I won't have you talking to me **like that**. Now

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

let's be sensible. (*Moves a pace or two, then stops.*) Could we have been blown out into the grounds?

PHIL.: No, this isn't Bournequay.

LADY L. (*impatiently*): Well, where is it then?

PHIL.: I don't know, but I do know it isn't Bournequay. Doesn't smell like it. Doesn't taste like it. I know it isn't. (*Stops, listening.*) Listen! I can hear somebody again.

LADY L. (*in alarm*): Philippa! Now——

PHIL.: Sh! (*Whispers.*) Yes, there's somebody over there.

They stare across where CUDWORTH is now seen spotted. He is short, perky, inquisitive, rather aggressive middle-aged man, with a self-assured, staccato, rather Cockney voice. He is wearing the clothes a prosperous business man would wear in his office—no hat, etc. They look at each other a moment.

CUD. (*confidently*): Oh, good evening! I suppose it is evening, isn't it?

PHIL.: I suppose so, though we're a bit mixed up.

CUD.: So am I. Better introduce ourselves, eh? Cudworth's my name.

PHIL.: I'm Philippa Loxfield. And this is my mother, Lady Loxfield.

CUD.: How do you do?

LADY L.: How d'you do, Mr. Cudworth? Er—can you tell me if this is Bournequay?

CUD. (*surprised*): Bournequay? Don't suppose so. I never go to Bournequay. Don't like the place.

PHIL.: Neither do I. But where are we then?

CUD.: Now you've got me. Just going to ask you that.

LADY L.: Indeed! But—if you don't mind my asking—how did you get here?

CUD.: I don't know. Not like me not to know a thing like that, but there it is.

PHIL.: You're just like us. Only I think the geyser blew up.

CUD.: Matter of fact, I thought I was dreaming. Don't often dream. No point in it. But I was working late at my office—going over some figures—and had just finished. Then I must have dropped off.

PHIL. (*amused*): He thinks he's dreaming us, Mother.

CUD.: No, no. Some other explanation, of course. But you're the first people I've seen. Let's move on a bit, shall we? (*He moves forward cautiously, the light following him.*)

ACT I

THEY CAME TO A CITY

PHIL.: Go on, Mother.

LADY L. (*vaguely*): Well—I must say—but I suppose we might as well——

She moves forward cautiously, with PHILIPPA close behind her, during his following speech.

CUD. (*staring about him*): Place of some sort here. First I've seen. Looks like a wall. This way.

They now move into his light, which opens a little to include them.

PHIL. (*staring about her*): Yes, it is a wall.

CUD.: That's right. And better a wall than nothing, if you ask me.

PHIL.: Certainly. Well, Mother, we're *somewhere* now.

LADY L.: What's the use of saying we're somewhere, if we don't know *where*. Really, Philippa!

CUD.: Did you say your name was Loxfield? Not in tin, are you?

PHIL. (*amused*): I've never been in tin.

LADY L. (*with dignity*): No. My husband was in the Colonial Service, and when he died had just retired from the governor-generalship of the Tago-Tago islands. He was Sir Francis Loxfield.

CUD.: Never heard of him, but I'm a commercial man myself. Now then, what shall we do?

PHIL. (*pointing left*): We'd better try that way.

CUD.: All right. There are two or three important wires I'd like to send as soon as we can find a post office that's open. (PHIL. *begins to giggle*.) What's the joke, young lady?

PHIL.: I believe you've got it all wrong. I'll bet anything there aren't any post offices round here.

LADY L.: You don't know anything about it, Philippa. And I expect that Mr. Cudworth will soon find a post office or something. Which reminds me I ought to have written to your Aunt Edith telling her not to think of coming to stay until the end of next week.

PHIL. (*as they begin moving left*): Perhaps it *is* the end of next week now.

CUD. (*moving*): That doesn't make sense, young lady.

PHIL.: Well, being here at all doesn't make sense to me.

LADY L.: You're not tired, are you, dear?

PHIL. (*impatiently*): No, I'm not, Mother. In fact, I'm enjoying it. Now, what happens there?

She hurries out left and the other two follow her but hesitate a moment.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

MRS. BATLEY (*unseen*): Excuse me!

LADY L. (*calling*): Philippa, not so fast, darling.

MRS. BATLEY: Excuse me!

CUD. (*stopping*): I thought I heard somebody then.

LADY L.: No, I don't think so. (*Calling.*) Now Philippa, *do* be careful.

They go out left. MRS. BATLEY is now spotted. She is a short, compact, middle-aged working-class woman, poorly dressed, carrying a shopping bag or basket. Behind a certain outward diffidence, belonging to her class, she is oddly confident and serene.

MRS. B. (*to herself, coolly*): Couldn't 'ear me, though I could 'ear them. Talking English—that's one good thing. None o' that jabber, jabber, jabber, like them four foreigners in the tram that day.

SIR GEORGE (*unseen, from left gangway*): Oh—I say!

MRS. B.: What's that?

SIR G. (*nearer*): I say!

MRS. B.: Well, what is it? Where are yer?

SIR GEORGE is now spotted. He is a big, self-indulgent type of man about sixty, dressed in tweeds. He is carrying a golf club. He has the assured manner, the superficial good nature, and easy drawl of the landed upper class.

SIR G.: Oh—look here—can you tell me how far I am from the club house?

MRS. B.: What club 'ouse?

SIR G. (*surprised*): Why, the West Windlesham Golf Club of course.

MRS. B.: I'm sorry, but I never 'eard of it. I live out Walthamstow way meself.

SIR G. (*horrified*): Walthamstow! Good God—this isn't Walthamstow, is it?

MRS. B.: No, it isn't. Nothing like it. So maybe it's what you said—West What's-it—

SIR G.: West Windlesham? Ought to be, because I was playing on the course there. But it doesn't look like it to me. D'you play golf?—no, I don't suppose you do—

MRS. B. (*much amused*): Me—play golf! (*Laughs.*) Well, nobody never asked me that before. I 'ad to come 'ere to be asked that.

SIR G.: Yes, very amusin'. Well, I was playing on the course there at West Windlesham—and I think one of those two young idiots behind—I told 'em they were too close—must have knocked me out with a long drive or something. Then I must have been somewhere

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deep in the rough—or rolled into a bunker—unconscious and so on, y'know—and then started wanderin' about. That's all I can think.

MRS. B.: I dare say that was it. I was doin' a bit o' shoppin' meself——

SIR G. (*ignoring her remark*): Look here, if anybody should ask for me, I'm Sir George Gedney. Sir George Gedney.

MRS. B. (*without irony*): Fancy!

SIR. G.: I suppose you haven't seen anybody about, have you?

MRS. B.: Yes. There's two ladies and a gentleman just went round that way. (*Pointing left.*) You'll catch 'em up if you 'urry. I'm a bit tired meself or I'd 'ave caught up to 'em.

SIR G. (*beginning to move*): That way, eh? I expect they know where we are. Live around here, probably. Sure to, eh?

Moves quickly out left. We hear him calling, "Oh I say—anybody there?" MRS. B. turns her head to watch him go, and listens to him. Then she faces audience again.

MRS. B. (*amused*): "D'you play golf?" 'e says. "No, I don't suppose you do," 'e says. "Me play golf," I says. "Well, nobody asked me that before," I says. . . .

She stops now because MRS. STRITTON can be heard calling unseen.

MRS. STR. (*anxiously calling*): Malcolm! Malcolm! Malcolm!

Each of these has brought her nearer and at last we see her spotted. She now sees MRS. BATLEY. She is a neatly dressed, fairly attractive, but anxious and inhibited suburban woman in her thirties.

MRS. B.: It's not Sir George Gedney yer want, is it?

MRS. STR.: No, I was calling for my husband. I'm Mrs. Stritton.

MRS. B. (*politely*): Pleased to meet yer, I'm sure. I'm Mrs. Batley. There was a short an' sharp sort o' gentleman—oldish, 'e was—that went with two ladies round that way. Could 'e be yer 'usband, Mrs. Stritton?

MRS. STR.: No, it doesn't sound like him at all.

MRS. B.: Was yer 'usband with yer?

MRS. STR. (*rather distressed*): Yes, we were together until about ten minutes ago. We're always together. We always have been.

MRS. B. (*philosophically*): Well, that's 'ow some likes it. An' some don't.

MRS. STR.: And then he said, "Let's go along here." And I said, "No, Malcolm, let's try this way." But I don't think he heard me. And now I don't know *what's* happened to him.

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MRS. B.: Well, 'e'll be turning up, I expect. I 'eard them first three sayin' there's some sort o' wall just in front 'ere, so that ought to stop 'im wanderin'. I should sit down, dear, an' just give up worryin'. The minute you give up worryin' about 'usbands, they always turn up.

MRS. STR. (*rather tartly*): Yes, but it was an accident. He wasn't *trying* to get away from me. He simply didn't hear me.

MRS. B.: I dare say. But 'e'll turn up. Excuse me askin', Mrs. Stritton, but do yer live round 'ere?

MRS. STR.: No, we live at Leamington. Mr. Stritton is the cashier of a bank there.

MRS. B.: Fancy that!

MRS. STR.: But we were going to stay with my uncle who has a large farm near Tewkesbury. And we were in the train, you see——

MRS. B. (*after a pause*): Yes?

MRS. STR. (*hesitating*): Well, I don't quite know what happened then.

MRS. B.: Same with me. I was shoppin' at the time meself——

MRS. STR.: We were going through a tunnel. And then I remember Malcolm—my husband—saying, "Are you all right, Dorothy?" And I said, "Yes, dear, I'm all right. But what's happened?" And he said, "I don't know. I wonder if we're dead." And I said, "Don't be silly, dear. Of course we aren't dead."

MRS. B.: That's right. We'd feel different if we was dead.

MRS. STR.: Just what I told him.

MRS. B.: Either we'd feel nothin' or we'd feel different. An' I feel just the same as I did. Feet achin' an' rheumatic pains in me legs, just the same. Besides, I've got me shoppin' basket, an' I wouldn't 'ave that if I was dead—that 'ud be silly. As I said—I was doin' a bit o' shoppin' at the time——

MRS. STR. (*cutting in*): I'm going back to look for him.

MRS. B.: I wouldn't.

MRS. STR.: But goodness knows where he may get to. (*Turns and begins to move, calling.*) Malcolm! Malcolm! (*Her light fades.*)

MRS. B. (*to herself, calmly*): One o' the worryin' kind. An' a fat lot o' good it does 'em.

Voices can now be heard coming along left. They belong to ALICE FOSTER and MALCOLM STRITTON, who in another moment are clearly spotted. ALICE is about thirty, cheaply dressed, looking at first sight too bold and handsome but vastly improving on acquaintance. MALCOLM STRITTON is about forty, neat, common-

place, the masculine equivalent of his wife. Note that none of the characters wore hats, except MRS. BATLEY.

MAL. (*as he comes along gangway*): And what happened then?

ALICE (*as she moves forward*): So I go straight to the manageress and say to her, "All right, Duchess, you can't want me to go any faster than I want to go, see? I don't mind work but I like to eat when I'm working. And there's your uniform—such as it is—and there's your wonderful list of rules and regulations—an' you know what to do with it—and just give me my card, thanks." So she does.

MAL.: Yes, but I don't see how that brought you here.

ALICE: Wait a minute. I haven't finished yet. So I go down into the bar, just to show my independence, and I have three gin and limes on an empty stomach. I walk out, still telling her in my mind what I think of her and her restaurant—and then—*bingo!*

MAL.: What does *bingo* stand for?

ALICE: It stands for *biff*—*wollop*—and black-out. I don't know whether I hit something or something hit me. But there's a black-out and the next minute, it seems, I'm wandering round here and asking you the way.

MRS. B.: I was doin' a bit o' shoppin' meself at the time.

ALICE: Hello, didn't notice you.

MRS. B.: Excuse me, but is that gentleman with yer Mr. Stritton?

MAL.: Yes, I'm Mr. Stritton.

MRS. B.: Well, yer wife's lookin' for yer.

MAL.: Yes, of course. I've been looking for her.

ALICE (*maliciously*): Since when?

MAL.: No, really, I have. (*To MRS. B.*) Where is she?

MRS. B. (*pointing right*): Along there somewhere.

MAL (*calling, but not loud*): Oh—er—Dorothy!

ALICE: Say it as if you meant it. (*Shouting.*) *Dor-othy!*

MRS. STR. (*coming back*): Malcolm! (*Nearer.*) Malcolm!

MAL. (*calling*): Yes, dear, here I am.

ALICE (*shouting*): Here he is.

MRS. STR. (*now appearing, spotted*): Oh—there you are, Malcolm. I've been looking everywhere for you.

MAL.: I've been looking for you, too, dear.

MRS. STR.: You can't have been looking very hard.

ALICE (*cheerfully*): Oh, he was.

MRS. STR. (*ignoring this and going on*): Come along, dear, and don't

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let's waste any more time. We ought to find out exactly where we are. Unless of course—your friend's already told you.

ALICE (*cheerfully*): If you mean me, I haven't told him because I don't know. But he did ask me. After he'd asked me if I'd seen you.

MRS. STR. (*coldly*): Really! (*With impatience.*) Oh—come *along*, Malcolm.

MAL. (*hastily*): Yes, of course. (*To ALICE.*) Excuse me.

He goes forward and joins her and she takes him up towards left and then out. We hear her as they go.

MRS. STR. (*indignantly*): . . . Looking everywhere for you . . . dreadfully worried . . . and there you are with that awful woman . . . who is she? . . . where did you meet her? . . .

ALICE *has now made herself comfortable, and has taken out some cigarettes.*

ALICE (*cheerfully*): Well, we know who wears the trousers there, don't we?

MRS. B.: I knew it before I saw 'im.

ALICE: I guessed it before I met her. Have a cigarette?

MRS. B. (*pleased to be asked*): No, thank yer, dear. Never took to it. What I'd like is to 'ave a proper sit down. Yer know what it is when yer've been shoppin'. An' I'd been on my feet all day before that. If yer'll excuse me, I'll see if there's anything a bit more comfortable further back 'ere.

She goes upstage, to sit down against wall, and the light fades off her. Meanwhile ALICE is lighting her cigarette, and puffing at it cosily.

ALICE: Well, I feel better now. I don't know where I am or what's going to happen. But I feel better. And anyhow I didn't know what was going to happen before this happened. So what's the odds? Here, are you still there?

MRS. B. (*now sitting in the dark*): Yes, I'm 'ere. 'Avin' a nice rest too, dear. Don't stop talking. I like to listen.

ALICE: That's all right then, 'cos I like to talk. Not always, y'know. But when I'm in the mood I do. Ever been a waitress?

MRS. B.: No. But my cousin's youngest is a waitress. Looks nice in her uniform too. My cousin showed me 'er photo.

ALICE: That's life. I'm telling you. Talk about your feet! I've felt sometimes mine must be as big as footballs. And it's a mean life too. My God—it's *mean*. You wouldn't believe! Most of the time the management's trying to cheat the customers, and half the time the customers are trying to cheat the management. Proper monkey-house.

The men aren't so bad—except of course half of 'em's got their pig's eyes sticking out of their head trying to imagine what you've got under your uniform. And some of 'em pinch you, of course.

MRS. B.: That's right. One pinched me once. Upper Clapton Road it was, outside a greengrocer's.

ALICE: But the *women*! Not all of 'em, y'know. We used to get a lot of little tired ones that creep in and out like mice and can't thank you enough just for waitin' on 'em at all. I'll bet you're that kind. But half of the rest thought they were buying you along with their pot of tea and beans on toast. There's one sort with sticking-out eyes and a parrot nose—you know the sort I mean—my God, I could have killed 'em! What's the matter with people anyway?

MRS. B.: They're all strung up inside, dear, because they're not getting their bits of 'appiness. That's all.

ALICE: And then they want to take it out of somebody else.

MRS. B. (*coolly*): That's right.

ALICE: I don't see anything right about it. Here, I say, where *are* we?

MRS. B.: Well, I 'aven't been able to work it out yet. Yer see, I was doin' my bit o' shoppin'—

ALICE (*cutting in*): Mind you, empty stomach or no empty stomach, I ought to be able to stand three gin and limes, even pourin' 'em down ever so fast. But of course I was upset. I pretended not to be—y'know how you do?—but I was upset all right. Even so, what's three gin and limes?

MRS. B.: Price of a 'ard day's work, dear.

ALICE: No, I mean to say, what are they to anybody who's worked behind a bar the same as I have. I'd three years working in bars. Six months in London—out at Hammersmith. Then eighteen months in Newcastle, where they call you "hinny". Then six months in Birmingham. I didn't like Birmingham. Anybody can have Birmingham for me. Then—hello, what's this?

She breaks off because JOE DINMORE comes in and is spotted. He is a fairly hefty, shabbily dressed, jaunty man about thirty-five or so, who assumes a rather rough, tough manner, which shows American influence. He stops and looks admiringly at ALICE.

JOE (*in easy masterful style*): Hello, Beautiful!

ALICE (*noting him but talking to MRS. B.*): I might have known there'd have to be one of these conquering heroes and gorgeous beasts. I did think I might be going to have a rest from 'em, but what a hope!

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JOE (*grinning*): Talking to yourself, Beautiful?

ALICE: Don't call me beautiful——

JOE: Why? Aren't you?

ALICE: No, I'm not, though I've seen worse.

JOE: So have I. Lots.

ALICE (*sharply*): But I don't like that tone of voice, so give it a rest. And if you want to know, I was talking to my friend, who's sitting over there in the dark.

JOE: Why is she?

ALICE: Because she wants to sit down and have a rest and be quiet. And so would you if you were a woman.

JOE: If I'd been a woman I'd have packed up years ago.

ALICE: Women don't pack up. If they packed up, everything would pack up.

JOE: Well, it can, for me.

MRS. B. (*calmly*): Perhaps it 'as.

JOE (*turning to include her*): Now, honest to God, that's just what I've been wondering. Yes, straight. Here, tell me this. Where are we?

MRS. B.: We ought to be somewhere Walthamstow way.

ALICE (*incredulously*): Go on!

MRS. B.:—We ought, I say, but we're not.

JOE: Now you're talking sense, Ma. (*He smokes and makes himself comfortable.*) You see, I was greasin' a ship's engine. I'd been doing it right across the South Atlantic. It was an old engine. At least as old as I am. In fact, I'd say—older. Yes—older.

ALICE (*with irony*): Now are you sure? I feel we ought to get this settled.

JOE: Now, Beautiful!

ALICE (*angrily*): Oh—drop it.

JOE (*seriously*): Here, you're not bad-tempered, are you?

ALICE: No, not as a rule.

JOE: Well then—take it easy. Nobody's trying to insult you.

ALICE: Now listen. I've been a waitress. I've been a barmaid. For ten years now I've had jobs where fellows like you come out with your *Beautifuls* and we have to pretend to think you're very witty.

JOE: The customer is always right, eh?

ALICE: Yes, and I could tell you plenty about that. But the point is, I want a rest from this *Beautiful* line just now, see?

JOE: Certainly. What's your name?

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ALICE: Alice Foster. What's yours?

JOE: Joe Dinmore, Miss Foster. Or is it Mrs. Foster?

ALICE: No, it isn't. What d'you do?

JOE: Well, I told you. I was at sea—down in the engine room. But I've done everything—except make money. I was in Australia one time—driving tractors. I was in South America one time, foreman on a railway gang.

ALICE: Didn't you ever try England?

JOE: Now and then, between times. But I was saving England up until I'd made my packet. It's a rich man's country. I've done a bit of docking. I was on a coaster one time. I——

ALICE: All right, Mr. Dinmore. I get the idea. You've just tried this and that. And now you're trying this.

JOE: Well, I don't know about trying this. Last time I remember anything I was down in the engine room, Miss Foster. What about you?

ALICE: I walked out of my job. It was terrible anyhow. I had three quick drinks, started worrying about myself, rushed into the street—it was dark—and then—*bingo!* I'm here.

JOE: Bingo—we're both here. I've been laying myself five to one I'd waken up in the jug somewhere, with a head on me like an old boiler. But if so, I don't see where you come in, Miss Foster.

ALICE: I don't either. And this Miss Foster's getting me down a bit.

JOE: I thought you wanted some politeness.

ALICE: All right, but don't overdo it. (*She now points to back, where it is now getting rapidly lighter.*) What's happening over there?

JOE: It's getting lighter, that's all.

ALICE (*moving forward*): What sort of place is this?

JOE (*also moving*): Reminds me of a place I saw in Peru one time.

As they go forward and the dawn light comes up, they see that
MRS. BATLEY is asleep comfortably, basket by her side.

ALICE (*pointing, whispering*): She's asleep.

JOE: Good old Ma! Let her sleep.

They move quietly away from her, and climb steps—to look over the wall. The light is still very dim and hazy.

ALICE (*not whispering now*): It wouldn't be a kind of castle, would it?

JOE: It might be, and then again it might be a town. Lots of these old towns have walls all round 'em. Seen 'em all over the place.

ALICE: I've seen 'em on the pictures.

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JOE (*looking down*): Can't see a thing yet. Looks a hell of a drop, though. No getting in this way.

ALICE (*after a pause*): I say, Joe—I can call you Joe, can't I?

JOE: Certainly you can, Alice.

ALICE (*slowly, softly*): What if there was something absolutely *wonderful* down there?

JOE: How d'you mean, *wonderful*?

ALICE (*slowly, hesitantly*): I don't know—quite. I'd know it if I saw it, though. Something different. Not a bit like London—or Newcastle—or Birmingham——

JOE (*grimly*): No, nor Liverpool, Glasgow, Port Said, Aden, Colombo, Bombay, Singapore, Sydney, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago.

ALICE (*slowly*): Ever since I could remember I've wanted to come suddenly on something *wonderful*, all different. To look over a wall and see it. To open a door and walk into it. Don't laugh.

JOE (*seriously*): I'm not laughing.

ALICE: You were smiling.

JOE: That's different, Alice. That's friendly.

ALICE: Yes, that's different. Just as this place would be different.

JOE: Smiling, not laughing. Friendly, eh?

ALICE: Yes, all friendly.

JOE: Like old Walt Whitman. I used to carry a little book of his around with me—could spout it by the yard. D'you know what he said? "I dreamt in a dream . . . I saw a city . . ."—what was it?—"invincible to the attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth. I dreamt that was the new city of friends."

ALICE: Yes, that's right, Joe.

JOE: Sounds fine. But I'm glad he said he only dreamt it. What a hope!

ALICE: Well, I'm a fool I suppose, but that's what I've always wanted—something wonderful, all different. And it's what—in a way—I've always expected. I think that's why I've never settled down—you know.

JOE: I'm just the chap who does know, Alice.

ALICE: I've thought that if I moved on and tried another job, somewhere else, it might somehow be *there*.

JOE: And it never was—was it?

ALICE: No, it never was, Joe.

They come down now. The light still grows.

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JOE: Ever called yourself a mug?

ALICE: Yes, but don't you try calling me one.

JOE: Okay. I've been calling myself one for—oh—fifteen years. No, longer.

ALICE: Steady. You're not that old.

JOE: I'm nearly thirty-five.

ALICE: Well, what's that?

JOE: Nothing—yet.

ALICE: Guess how old I am.

JOE (*promptly*): Twenty-two.

ALICE: Go on! I'm twenty-eight.

JOE: I don't believe it.

ALICE (*confidentially*): And I look it. You wait. Mind, I'm a bit tired, y'know, and the old face is feeling it, what with one thing and another.

They look at each other a moment. JOE smiles.

JOE: You're all right, Alice.

ALICE: Thanks, Joe. (*To change the subject, indicating door right*) Here, what about that door?

JOE: Let's see. (*They have a look at everything on right.*) Kind of watch tower. They have 'em in these old walled towns. I've seen one before.

ALICE: I dare say. But does this strike you as being old?

JOE: No, it doesn't.

ALICE: It doesn't me either. Though of course they might have just done it up.

They are now looking at the door curiously. The scene is still growing lighter, though not full daylight yet.

JOE: Nobody's going to break down this door in a hurry.

ALICE (*who has been examining it*): What's it made of?

JOE: Don't know. Looks like a kind of plastic to me. New stuff.

ALICE: There's nothing to open it with—no handle or anything.

JOE: No, it's not that kind of door. This door's either tight shut, as it is now, or it's wide open. That's the sort of door it is.

ALICE: I must say, men amuse me. You're suddenly talking about this door—all so proud and grand—just as if you'd helped to make it. I've noticed that before about men.

JOE (*looking hard at her*): Here, what d'you know about men?

ALICE (*returning his look*): I know plenty.

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JOE: I'm sorry to hear it.

ALICE (*steadily*): I left home when I was seventeen—wasn't anything else for it—and went in the chorus with a touring revue. Had two years of that, though I was never any good. Been on my own, knocking around, ever since. Working, but trying to enjoy myself too. So you can just work it out for yourself. About men or anything else.

JOE: I see. But what are you telling me all this for?

ALICE: I don't know. I suddenly felt I ought to tell you.

JOE: Well, I don't want to know.

ALICE: Oh—I see.

JOE: I don't think you do, but we'll let it pass.

Suddenly he bangs loudly on the door. He wakens MRS. BATLEY, who is rather startled.

MRS. B.: My word, you made me jump.

JOE: Sorry, Ma.

MRS. B.: What are you doing?

JOE: I'm letting 'em know we're here.

They wait—for somebody to open the door.

MRS. B. (*calmly*): That door'll open when it wants to open, and not before.

JOE: Now how d'you know that, Ma?

MRS. B.: I 'ave that feeling about it, that's all. Nobody ever takes much notice of me, but I 'ave these feelings about things.

ALICE: So have I.

JOE: I'm landed here with a couple o' witches, am I?

ALICE: No, just a couple of women.

MRS. B.: Oh no, dear, there's more than the two of us. There's that gentleman and 'is wife—y'know, the one that was a bit jealous. Then there's a golfing gentleman—Sir George Gedney. Then there's two ladies—mother and daughter—with a little sharp gentleman—

JOE: Here, we're quite a party, aren't we?

MRS. B. (*looking left, coolly*): This is the little sharp gentleman coming now.

They look left. Enter CUDWORTH, looking rather hot and fussed.

CUD.: Do you happen to know where I can find a post office? (ALICE looks at him and then suddenly screams with laughter. Then MRS. B. laughs because ALICE laughs. JOE grins. CUDWORTH stares at them in astonishment.) What's the joke? Go on. Tell me. Nobody can say I can't enjoy a joke.

ALICE (*trying to recover*): I'm sorry, Mr.—er——

CUD.: Cudworth's the name.

ALICE: Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Cudworth, but honestly, I don't know why I laughed, but it suddenly came over me—seeing you standing there, all fussed, wanting a post office.

CUD.: Can't see anything funny about it.

JOE: Well, why d'you want a post office?

CUD.: Because I must send a couple of telegrams.

JOE: Urgent?

CUD.: Very urgent. Business, y'know.

JOE: Oh—business. Making money.

CUD.: That's it.

JOE: But d'you need some money very badly?

CUD.: No. I've plenty. But that's not the point.

JOE: Well, what is the point then?

CUD.: One of these argumentative chaps, are you? All right. You can't catch me. The point is—I'm engaged in some business operations. I can either succeed in 'em or fail in 'em. If I fail in 'em, I look a fool and people begin to think I'm losing my touch. I don't want that to happen. And that's why I want to send a couple of telegrams.

MRS. B. (*dreamily*): I said he was a sharp little gentleman.

CUD.: So I am. And thanks for mentioning it. Now what about this door? Why are we all standing here arguing about nothing, when here's a door?

He goes up to it and noses round it. Then he raps on it.

JOE: We've tried that, only much louder. But go on.

CUDWORTH *raps again, harder. He steps back and looks at whole tower.*

CUD.: There's another tower arrangement further along there—— (*Indicates to left.*) I've just been on there with a fool of a woman and her daughter. The woman's a snob. But she's happy now because Sir George Somebody's turned up. (*Irritably.*) Who are we anyhow? What are we doing here?

MRS. B.: Well, I'm 'avin' a nice rest.

CUD.: What do you do when you're not having a nice rest?

MRS. B.: Look after a 'ouse full o' people an' go out cleanin' three times a week.

ALICE (*to CUD.*): Aren't you sharp and nosey?

CUD.: Yes. And I'll bet you've never kept any job more than a year. Have you?

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ALICE: You mind your own business.

CUD. (*chuckles*): All right. But a lot of things are my business.

JOE (*who has been looking him over*): Now, I'd say you're one o' these chaps who started as a black-coated worker—clerk or whatnot—and then by never missing a trick and by giving all your mind to it pushed yourself pretty high up into the boss and capitalist class.

CUD. (*who takes this as a compliment*): And you wouldn't be far wrong either. What are you? Mechanic or something, eh?

JOE: Right. Mechanic or something.

CUD.: Jack of all trades, eh?

JOE: Right.

CUD.: Here to-day and gone to-morrow, eh?

JOE: Right every time.

CUD.: Yes, and where's it got you?

JOE: Well, it's got me here. Where has your line got you?

CUD.: If I told you what I was worth, you'd be surprised.

JOE: Surprised? I wouldn't be even interested.

ALICE (*reproachfully*): Now Joe, don't be rude. You don't look like a Joe. (*To Mrs. B.*) Does he?

MRS. B.: No, he doesn't.

JOE: Here, what *is* this? Are you women ganging up on me already? Know much about women, Mr. What's-it-Cudworth?

CUD.: No. I keep away from 'em.

ALICE: I'll bet you do too. Take your mind off your business, don't they?

CUD (*coolly*): That's right. And always interfering. Messy too.

ALICE (*indignantly*): What d'you mean, *messy*?

JOE: I know what he means. Mind you, he's wrong. But I know what he means.

CUD: Thought you would. How many times have they got you into trouble—you know—spent your money, taken your mind off your work, landed you into quarrels, cost you your job—eh?

JOE (*grinning*): I can't remember.

CUD.: You see.

ALICE (*half humorous, half serious*): I might have known when you started off with your *Hello, Beautiful*. In fact, I did know. I said so. (*To Mrs. B.*) Didn't I say so right at the start?

MRS. B.: Yes, dear. I 'eard you. But 'e's all right. No 'arm in 'im at all.

JOE: Thank you, Ma.

Enter PHILIPPA, excitedly.

PHIL.: I say, Mr. Cudworth, do you know what there is down there?

CUD.: No, couldn't see a thing last time I looked down.

PHIL.: Well, you can now. There's a city.

ALICE: A city! Let's have a look.

She joins PHIL., followed by JOE and CUDWORTH, in looking down over the wall. It is now much lighter though not quite full daylight.

PHIL.: You see, it *is* a city, isn't it? Look—you can see the avenues and squares. I saw them distinctly a minute ago.

ALICE (*excitedly*): I can see them. It's all misty yet, but I can just see them. Look, Joe!

JOE: I am looking, Alice, but I can't see any avenues or squares or anything but a lot o' ground mist.

PHIL (*impatiently*): You aren't looking *properly*.

CUD. (*staring away*): Well, *I'm* looking properly—staring my eyes out—and I can't see anything but mist. Shapes in it, of course, but they might be anything.

PHIL. (*impatiently*): They aren't *anything*. I tell you, they're big buildings and houses and streets and squares and boulevards. It's a city. And a marvellous city. I distinctly saw it.

ALICE: I hope you're right. I believe you are too.

Enter MALCOLM and DOROTHY STRITTON, rather cross and argumentative.

MAL.: I'm *not* arguing, Dorothy. There's no point in having an argument when we don't know what's happened to us or where we've got to——

MRS. STR.: But that's what I've been saying to you all along——

MAL.: Just let me finish, please, dear. I say—I'm *not* arguing, but I do insist that never for one single moment did I suggest we should go to Tewkesbury. It was your idea from the first. I'm not blaming you—why should I?—but I do say——

MRS. STR. (*who has just seen it*): There's a door there.

MAL. (*holding off from it*): So I see.

MRS. STR. (*who is now examining it*): No bell or knocker or anything.

MAL.: Even if there was, I don't see what right we have to start ringing or banging away. We don't know who lives there——

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MRS. STR. (*not loudly but in sudden rage*): We can ask them where we are, can't we?

MAL. (*going nearer, slowly*): Yes, I suppose so. But, y'know, it's still very early——

MRS. STR. (*fiercely*): Malcolm, if you won't bang on that door, then I will.

MAL. (*moving slowly*): Oh—well—of course—I'll do it——

JOE (*calling across*): Don't bother, pal. We've all tried it—and they don't reply.

MAL.: Oh—thanks. You heard what he said, dear——

MRS. STR.: Of course I heard what he said. (*And as if to show what she thought of it, she goes to door and begins knocking on it loudly.*)

MAL. (*when clearly nothing is happening*): You see, dear——

MRS. STR. (*exasperated*): Oh Malcolm, you are maddening——
(*She sits down, not far from where the others are standing.*)

ALICE (*cheerfully*): We think there's a city down there.

PHIL.: I'm sure there is.

MRS. STRITTON *ignores this and looks straight ahead. MALCOLM notices this and feels he ought to answer for her.*

MAL. (*with nervous cheerfulness*): Oh really? A city?

ALICE (*cheerfully and casually*): Yes. Come and see if you can see it.

MAL. *exchanges a glance with his wife. She looks furious.*

MRS. STR. (*angrily*): Well, go on, see if you can see it.

MAL.: Well, wouldn't you like to see if you——

MRS. STR. (*sharply*): No. I don't believe anybody can see anything yet.

PHIL. (*calling across*): I saw it quite clearly.

MRS. STR. (*contemptuously*): Oh, did you really?

PHIL.: Yes, I did. And I wish you wouldn't be so beastly bad-tempered.

MRS. STR. (*angrily*): What do you mean?

CUD. (*coolly*): She means bad-tempered, Mrs.—er—— (To MALCOLM.) What's your name? Mine's Cudworth.

MAL.: Stritton.

CUD.: London?

MAL.: No, Mr. Cudworth, Leamington. I'm in the West Midland Bank there.

CUD.: Can't say I know it. Heard of it, of course, but can't really say I know it. I bank at Barclays. Have done for years.

JOE (*grinning*): Where do you bank, Miss Foster?

ALICE (*promptly*): Post Office Savings, Mr. Dinmore. What about you?

JOE: The London and Wide World Rolling Stone No Moss Limited.

MRS. STR. (*to MRS. B.*): I think it's going to be warmer, don't you?

MRS. B. (*politely*): I wouldn't be at all surprised, Mrs. Stritton.

PHIL.: I'm beginning to wonder if we're not all crackers.

CUD. (*puzzled*): Crackers?

JOE: She means cracked, daft, bug-house, barmy.

CUD.: Certainly not, Miss Loxfield. Silly idea! Don't feel at all cracked myself. Just rather out of touch with things, that's all.

PHIL.: Oh—well, for that matter, I feel all right. Rather better than usual, though that's not saying an awful lot. But I feel that something might *happen*.

ALICE (*heartily*): Yes. So do I.

They look at each other with a kind of quick understanding.

PHIL.: Yes—but—well, you look as if quite a lot had happened to you already——

ALICE (*half humorous, half serious*): Here, steady.

JOE (*butting in*): I know what she means.

ALICE (*quickly*): No, you don't, and you keep out of this.

PHIL.: But, you see, hardly anything happens to me. Honestly.

JOE: Don't you do any work?

PHIL.: No.

JOE (*not roughly*): Well, if you went and did some work, perhaps something might start happening——

PHIL.: I know, but mother'd have a fit.

JOE: Well, let her have a fit.

PHIL.: Oh—it's all right talking——

CUD.: If you ask me, there's a lot to be said for that old idea about women's place being in the home.

JOE: How many girls have you got in your office?

CUD.: Six.

JOE: And how many women have you got in your home?

CUD.: I haven't any.

JOE: Well then, what's the use of telling us you believe there's a lot to be said for women's place being in the home? You don't really

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believe it at all. If you did, you'd pop those six girls from the office in your home—and make a start that way.

CUD.: Talk sense!

ALICE (*to* CUD.): Don't mind him, Mr. Cudworth, he's only showing off.

PHIL.: I don't know. It sounds sensible to me.

ALICE (*with humorous warning*): Hoy!

PHIL.: No—I mean, people are always saying they believe this and that, but then you see that they don't behave as if they believed it. There's such a lot of *pretence* about.

CUD.: Quite right too. Has to be.

PHIL.: Why?

CUD.: Got to keep up appearances, young woman. You'd be among the first to grumble if we started dropping our pretences. Sort of manners really. (*To other two men.*) Aren't they?

MAL.: Yes.

JOE: No.

MRS. STR. (*with sudden sharp effect*): I believe you enjoy contradicting people, don't you?

JOE: Up to a point—yes.

ALICE (*unfriendly*): I suppose you agree with everybody—eh?

MRS. STR.: We're not talking about me.

MAL. (*nervously filling the gap*): This—er—place rather reminds me of a town in France that we once saw. D'you remember, Dorothy? The Châteaux Country. Near the River Loire, y'know. Very beautiful old places they are too. Though of course this doesn't look particularly old. Quite new, in fact. But somehow there's a resemblance. Don't you think so, Dorothy?

MRS. STR. (*hesitates—then*): Yes, there is, Malcolm.

The others paying no attention to them, they give each other a smile, then MRS. STR. pats the place next to her and he goes and sits there. Of the others, only ALICE is still staring down, the rest being still up there but facing away from wall.

LADY LOXFIELD and SIR GEORGE now enter together, slowly, impressively, from left.

LADY L.: But surely *she* was a Carmichael.

SIR G.: Yes, rather. Her cousin married a cousin o' mine—you may have run into him—Tommy Basingworth. Nice little fella, Tommy, so long as you didn't have too much of him. His brother Archie—also my cousin, of course—married one of the Logan girls.

ACT I

THEY CAME TO A CITY

LADY L.: Oh, good gracious—yes. Those Logan girls! Which one was it—Kitty?

SIR G.: No, Dolly. Kitty came rather a nasty cropper, you remember. I used to go duck-shootin' with their brother—Piggy Logan.

CUD. (*crisply cutting in*): Used to be a Logan running the Thames and Medway Trust. Very sharp he was too. Couldn't put anything past that Logan.

SIR G.: Not the same family. Not very brainy, these Logans. You in the City?

CUD.: Yes. Are you?

SIR G.: Oh—good lord—no. Often wish I was. Got two or three potty little directorships that take me up to town now and then. That's all.

LADY L.: Philippa!

PHIL. (*not eagerly*): Yes, Mother?

LADY L.: You remember that Mrs.—er—well, I'd better not mention names—but the woman we met last week at Rhoda's—the one who mixed the cocktails—you *remember*? Well, Sir George has been telling me all about her, and I was perfectly right. She *was*—and not once but *twice*!

PHIL (*who isn't interested*): Was *what*?

LADY L.: Di-vorced, darling. Just as I thought. And not once—but twice.

MRS. STR. (*boldly*): Well, you don't know whose fault it was.

LADY L. (*coldly*): I beg your pardon.

MRS. STR.: I say—you don't know whose fault it was.

MAL. (*muttering caution*): Dorothy!

LADY L. *gives them a stare and then turns away.*

SIR G. (*to CUD.*): Some of the fellas at the club seem to be makin' a very nice thing out of West Coast Manganese.

CUD.: Don't touch 'em.

SIR G.: Didn't think of doin', actually.

JOE: I was out on the Coast one time. It was hell.

SIR G.: I wasn't addressin' you, y'know.

JOE (*grinning*): I wasn't addressing you.

SIR G. (*ignoring this, to CUD.*): What d'you fellas recommend these days?

CUD. (*as if about to give hot tip*): Do you want some easy money?

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SIR G. (*eagerly*): Yes.

CUD.: So do I.

SIR G.: Well?

CUD.: That's all for the present. But I think I know where to find some easy money.

MRS. B. (*calmly*): Except that yer can't find a post office.

CUD. (*irritably*): I know, I know.

MRS. B. (*with no outward signs of mirth*): That gives me a bit of a laugh, that does. If yer'll excuse me sayin' so, Mr. Cudworth.

CUD.: Here, don't you be vindictive.

JOE: I'm surprised at you, Ma.

MRS. B.: After cleanin' an' doin' a lot of offices for sharp gentlemen like you, I think I'm entitled to a bit of a laugh now. An' I'll bet yer don't know 'oo cleans your office, Mr. Cudworth.

CUD. (*briskly*): Well, that's where you're wrong. I do know. It's a Mrs. Sutton, who lives at E.56, Booker's Buildings, E.C.2. Matter of fact, she's the widow of a fellow who was once a clerk with me. Years ago. Years and years ago. He died long since. Edgar Sutton. Dreamt about him the other night.

SIR G.: Well, talking about dreams—queer thing, but my Uncle Everard, who was years in the Straits Settlements and then came home to be Joint Master of the North Barsetshire, used to dream regularly—once a month—he was being chased by a leopard. Which just shows you—well, things are pretty queer really—dreams and all that. Care for another stroll, Lady Loxfield?

LADY L.: Just what I was about to suggest. Philippa!

PHIL.: No, Mother, I'd much rather not.

LADY L. (*firmly*): And I'd much rather you came with us.

PHIL. (*emphatically*): Mother, I want to stay here.

They stare at each other, challengingly, a moment. There is a pause. The light is now much stronger, and now there comes a golden gleam from below, as if the city there were reflecting the dawn glow. ALICE, who has been staring down, now jumps up, pointing.

ALICE (*excitedly*): Oh—Christians awake!—look there!

JOE and PHIL. turn and stare down eagerly. CUDWORTH and then the STRITTONS are next, then LADY LOXFIELD and SIR GEORGE. They all take it in slowly. We hear a distant but clear high fanfare.

SIR G. (*casually*): Rum sort of show.

ALICE (*indignantly*): It's beautiful.

SIR G.: Reminds me of that—what's it—Empire Exhibition at Wembley——

LADY L.: I found that frightfully tiring—didn't you?

SIR G.: Yes.

PHIL.: I'll bet this isn't a bit like it.

ALICE (*eagerly*): Well, what do *you* think of it, Joe?

JOE (*slowly*): I don't know.

ALICE (*disgusted*): How d'you mean—you don't know?

JOE: I've seen places before that looked as good as this. You'd see 'em a long way off, after weeks at sea, and think you were sailing into Heaven. But when you got inside 'em—God, they *stank*.

ALICE: We're not talking about smells now.

JOE: I'm not either. I mean that when you got inside 'em, the carry-on there was so terrible—poor devils sitting about in rags with their ribs showing through—kids crawling about the gutters with their faces all running sores——

PHIL. (*shuddering*): Oh—shut up. Don't spoil it.

JOE (*grimly*): All right. I won't. But that's why I said I didn't know.

PHIL.: Anyhow, it's not like that down there. (*To ALICE.*) Is it?

ALICE: No, I'm sure it isn't.

CUD. (*after a pause*): Looks very fancy to me. Too fancy. Don't care for anything fancy.

SIR G.: Quite right.

MAL. (*to his wife*): What do *you* think of it, dear?

MRS. STR. (*uncertainly*): It's—peculiar, isn't it?

MAL.: Yes—it seems—a long way from home, doesn't it?

MRS. B. (*who has never moved*): It don't to me.

MRS. STR.: Doesn't it?

MRS. B.: No.

JOE (*surprised*): But you didn't—— (*Breaks off and stares at her.*) What are you trying to tell us, Ma?

MRS. B.: I'm not tryin' to tell yer anything. But I 'ave my little ideas same as the rest of yer——

JOE: Quite right, Ma.

ALICE: Go on, Mrs. Batley.

MRS. B.: No, dear, that's all.

The others stare at her, puzzled, then look down again.

LADY L. (*dreamily*): When I was a girl I went to Venice. I went for ten days . . . quite by myself. . . . It wasn't easy to do that then

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. . . but I did it. Spring . . . 1909 . . . Venice in Spring . . . and before these terrible wars began and everything changed . . . I was only a girl, of course . . . very young . . . and foolish . . . but I was very happy . . . very happy . . .

PHIL. (*who has been staring at her*): But, Mother, you never told me!

LADY L.: No, Philippa. I never told anybody.

PHIL.: But you ought to have told *me*.

LADY L. *shakes her head, and then gets down and wanders slowly off left*. PHIL. *hesitates a moment, then follows her hastily*.

ALICE: Can't see any people about down there. And it's the people I want to see now.

CUD.: Too early. Nobody up yet. (*Getting down.*) Later on, they'll probably open that door.

SIR G. (*also getting down*): You going in, then?

CUD.: Certainly. Place that size—well worth looking at.

SIR G. (*joining him*): Agree with you. Ought to be able to get a bath and some sort of breakfast. What d'you make of the place?

CUD. (*confidentially*): Can't say for certain yet, of course. But plenty of money there. No doubt about that. Can't put up buildings that size for nothing.

SIR G.: Dunno about that. Some of these people seem to. Enormous buildings—cathedrals, palaces, all that sort of thing—and nobody in the place with tuppence to bless himself with. Seen that often. Spain, Italy, out East. You'd be surprised. Care for a stroll?

CUD. (*beginning to move left with him*): All right. Might see a bit more, further along. Some of these people have the assets but don't know how to use 'em. Take South America, for example . . .

They have gone off left. JOE looks after them, then turns to ALICE, who is still staring down.

JOE: Did you hear those two?

ALICE: No, I wasn't taking any notice. Why?

JOE: Typical specimens o' the boss class. Grab, grab, grab—that's all they care about.

ALICE: And what d'you care about?

JOE: That's not the point.

ALICE: What is the point then?

JOE (*emphatically*): The point is—here's two typical specimens—

ALICE (*angrily*): Oh—shut up about your typical specimens.

JOE: What's the matter with you?

ALICE: It isn't what's the matter with me, it's what the matter with *you*. Here we are—and down there is a wonderful place, like nothing we've ever seen before. And all you can do is to shake your fat head and say you don't know what it's like, and then pay no more attention to it because you're bothering about your typical specimens of the boss class.

JOE: And so what?

ALICE: Well, I say you're as bad as they are—if not worse.

JOE: Like hell I am!

ALICE (*stormily*): I might have known, I might have known.

JOE: Now listen——

ALICE: Oh—shut it!

She hurries out left. JOE stares after her, then looks at STRITTON.

JOE: Did you hear that? What's the matter with her?

MAL.: I don't know, I'm sure.

MRS. STR. (*unpleasantly*): I'm surprised at that. You talked to her long enough.

MAL.: Now, Dorothy, you know very well I was looking for you——

MRS. STR.: Yes, you told me that before.

MAL. (*wearily*): All right. All right.

MRS. STR. (*marching out left*): It isn't all right.

MALCOLM looks for a moment as if he were about to follow her, but then restrains himself. JOE goes nearer to him—and nearer to

MRS. B.

MAL. (*apologetically*): My wife's rather upset . . . she isn't too strong . . . and this queer business, well, you can imagine. You see, by this time we ought to have been staying with her uncle. He has a large farm—two farms really—near Tewkesbury. And now of course we don't know where we are, and he doesn't either. So she's naturally upset. (*Hesitating.*) Perhaps I ought to go after her.

JOE: I wouldn't.

MRS. B. (*quietly*): Neither would I. Leave 'er alone.

JOE: She's bad-tempered, that's what's the matter with her. And so is that other Judy—Alice. Here, Ma, how do you women get that way—all sugar and honey one minute, and the next minute tearing and spitting like wild cats? What causes it?

MRS. B.: Diff'rent things—same as you.

JOE: Oh no, not the same as us. I can't have that. (*To MAL.*) Can you?

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MAL.: No, I can't, I must say. They seem to lose their temper so suddenly, and without any real reason.

MRS. B.: No, Mr. Stritton, there's allus a reason. Now Mrs. Stritton, she went off in a 'uff, as yer might say, like that, 'cos, as you said, she's upset an' worried. An' I expect she's one of them who when they starts worryin' soon begin to worry about *everything*. So just 'cos she catches yer talkin' to that young woman—Alice, she feels more uncertain still—an' then she loses 'er temper with you just 'cos yer've made 'er feel like that just when she needed a bit o' comfort.

JOE: Ma, I can see you know it all. Now what about the other one—Alice? What made her fly off the handle?

MRS. B.: Well, I don't know that I ought to let on about 'er.

JOE: Go on, Ma. I'll keep it to myself. And so will Mr. Stritton.

MAL.: Oh—of course. Most certainly.

MRS. B.: That Alice is one that's had a lot o' disappointments. Well, she meets you 'ere an' fancies you——

MAL. (*startled*): Me?

MRS. B.: No, no—'im. Then she's disappointed in yer, and that makes 'er mad at 'erself for expectin' anything, an' being disappointed again, and then she gets mad at you 'cos yer've made 'er mad at 'erself.

JOE (*gloomily*): Yes, I see.

MAL. (*politely*): Quite a character-reader really, aren't you, Mrs.—er—Batley?

MRS. B.: No, but I like to watch people an' think about 'em.

JOE (*gloomily*): Ma, you've depressed me.

MRS. B.: Now, now! Just 'cos she was disappointed in you!

JOE: No, no, no. You've got it all wrong there, Ma. That's too simple altogether.

MRS. B.: It's better if it's simple.

JOE: Not with me it isn't. And I'll tell you why. I'm not a simple character. I'm complicated, I am. (*To MAL.*) Are you?

MAL.: Well—no—I wouldn't say I was. But not simple either. Somewhere between the two, I'd say.

JOE (*gloomily*): My trouble is—I don't believe in the Revolution. I'm a revolutionary who can't believe in the Revolution. You can see where that lands a fellow. Nowhere. Or here.

MRS. B.: What you want's a nice little 'ome.

JOE (*shouting*): I don't want a nice little home. I've spent my life running away from nice little homes.

MRS. B.: Yes, and where's it got you?

JOE (*ordinary tone again*): I just said that. I'm nowhere. But that's because I can't believe in the Revolution.

MAL.: What Revolution?

JOE: The one that's on its way. Oh, you're for it all right. And wait till you see what it does to Leamington and the West Midland Bank. And I'll bet you're very very fond of Leamington and the West Midland Bank. Aren't you?

MAL. (*decidedly*): No, I'm not.

JOE: You surprise me.

MAL.: Leamington doesn't suit me. Never has done. And as for the West Midland Bank—well, to be frank—(*drops his voice cautiously*)—I consider it to be completely out-of-date—and—and——

JOE (*with mock whisper*): Go on. Tell me the worst.

MAL. (*in a whisper*): An obstacle to true economic progress.

JOE: Well, well, well!

MAL. (*very confidentially*): And another thing. I consider the chairman of the Bank, Sir Herbert Groosby-Perkins, a mean and contemptible old toad.

JOE: That's fine. But what's the use of just whispering it to me? Tell everybody. Shout it at the top of your voice. I'll bet you daren't. Do you good, y'know. Time you let off steam, after pussyfooting it in that Leamington bank for years. Go on. Tell them. Let it rip. I'll dare you to.

MAL.: All right. (*He goes to the wall, and shouts down, very loud.*) I consider the chairman of the Bank, Sir Herbert Groosby-Perkins, a mean and contemptible toad.

JOE (*as MAL. turns*): Good! How d'you feel?

MAL. (*smiling*): I feel better.

MRS. STRITTON *dashes in.*

MRS. STR. (*urgently*): Malcolm, what on earth are you doing—shouting like that? I thought you'd gone mad.

MAL. (*smiling*): No.

JOE: What's the use of saying No? Tell her you *have* gone mad.

MRS. STR. (*urgently, clutching him*): Malcolm—please! Are you—all right?

He nods, still smiling. Then he calmly but efficiently kisses her, which both surprises her and impresses her, so that she stares at him. He gives her another smiling nod and releases her.

MAL.: Why can't you believe in the Revolution, Mr.—er——?

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JOE: Call me Joe. I can't believe in the Revolution because I've gone sour. I don't see people making anything good together. They always seem to make something bad. When they make anything good, they don't do it all together but by themselves. But if the Revolution is to be any use, they've got to be able to make something good together. See what I mean?

MAL.: Not quite, Joe. Give me an example.

JOE: You know a house—or a pub—or one of those foreign cafés—and it's good. No doubt about that, it's good. But that's because one man's done it. But when you get a town, a city, a country, what are they like, the whole dam' lot of 'em? They're terrible. See?

MAL.: Yes, I see.

JOE: Pals of mine say "Ah yes, but look at the conditions, look at the system—all wrong." I agree. The conditions are stinking. The system's hell. All right. But that don't convince me that people can make anything good together. It doesn't seem to happen that way. I've gone sour.

MRS. S. (*after a pause*): You talk a lot, don't you?

JOE: Yes, I talk and talk.

MRS. STR.: What for?

MAL.: Here—steady, Dorothy!

MRS. STR.: Why should I mind what I say to him? He doesn't mind what he says. Telling you to tell me you've gone mad!

JOE: I thought you might like him better mad. You've had him sane long enough. And didn't seem to think much of it. There ought to be something somewhere in a man that a woman can't control, one bit of him just out of her reach.

MRS. B.: Same with women.

JOE: Right, Ma. (*To MRS. STR.*) I talk and talk because I like it, because I'm not sure of myself, because I'm always finding things out. Why are you so disappointed? What is it you want?

MRS. STR.: I want three children and a large garden.

JOE: What have you got?

MRS. STR.: No children and a small garden.

MAL.: You see, things have been difficult——

JOE: Don't make a personal issue of it. And no apologies. She's heard 'em already, and we don't want to hear 'em. Do we, Ma?

MRS. B.: Yes, I do.

JOE: Well, get together with her afterwards, and thrash it out. (*To MRS. STRITTON.*) Must they be your own children and your own garden?

MRS. STR.: Yes, of course. What do you think I want? To work in a day nursery in a public park? (*With sudden passion.*) I want my own children and my own place.

She moves away and sits by MRS. B., who gives her hand a consoling pat or two.

JOE (*after a pause, to MAL.*): That's how it is, you see. Nearly everybody wants *their own*.

MAL.: It's understandable, isn't it?

JOE: Yes, but then you say things have been difficult, and my pals say the conditions are terrible, and I say the system's all wrong. So let's change 'em, and up the Revolution. But nearly everybody still wants their own this and that. They still can't make anything good together. So what chance have we with the Revolution? And what chance have we without it? See what I mean?

MAL.: Up to a point. But I've never thought on those lines.

JOE: What lines have you thought on?

MAL.: Banking and credit. The private control of public credit. That won't do, y'know, Joe. It simply won't do. We oughtn't to have it. I wouldn't say this to everybody, of course——

JOE: Why not? Say it to everybody. Have it out with your chairman, Sir Herbert Boogy-Woogy——

MAL. (*smiling*): If I had it out with Sir Herbert Groosby-Perkins, he'd jolly soon have me out.

JOE: Well, you'll probably be out soon anyhow. Perhaps you're out now. After all, what are you doing here? What are we all doing here?

MRS. STR.: Now you're beginning to talk sense. That's what I want to know. That's what's worrying me. Sitting here, chattering and arguing about nothing, and all the time we don't know where we are, how we've got here, why we're here, how we'll ever get back——

JOE (*excited, pointing to door*): Hy—look!

The door in the tower now slowly begins to open, until it is wide open. In the entrance thus revealed, there is light suggesting sunlight coming from an open space beyond but not seen. They stare at it in silence.

MRS. B. (*rising, calmly*): Well, I'm going to 'ave a nice look round.

She goes, not taking her shopping basket. The others, surprised, watch her disappear through the entrance.

JOE: If you ask me, there's more in Ma than meets the eye. She's a dark horse, Ma is. Off she goes, first in, without turning a hair.

MRS. STR.: Perhaps because she doesn't talk so much.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

JOE: I wouldn't be surprised.

MAL. *is now examining the entrance in a tentative kind of way.*

MRS. STR. (*rather alarmed*): Malcolm! Be careful.

MAL.: Yes, dear. I just want to see what happens.

He disappears through the entrance. MRS. STR. has now risen and is moving uncertainly towards the door. MALCOLM reappears.

It's all right. There are some steps the other side that go down to a roadway that leads you straight down into the city.

MRS. STR.: Do you think—we could go in?

MAL. (*with a shade of uncertainty*): I don't see why not. After all, they opened the door—as if they expected people to come in this way. And it all—seems—a civilised sort of place——

MRS. STR. (*hesitating, then making up her mind*): All right, come on then.

They go in together. JOE, humming or whistling casually, wanders in after them. All three disappear, but JOE reappears a moment afterwards. Just as he sits or sprawls negligently, PHILIPPA and LADY LOXFIELD arrive from left.

PHIL. (*eagerly*): You can see lots of people down there now. They look awfully nice too.

LADY L.: Philippa darling, you don't know *what* they're like. How could you tell from that distance? They may be *awful*.

PHIL.: Well, they didn't look awful. (*Noticing the door, gasping.*) Help!—*the door's open.*

JOE: Wide open. You go through there, down some steps, and in five minutes you're in the city. Ma led the way, and Stritton and his wife have just gone.

PHIL.: Come on, Mother. Let's go.

LADY L.: Now Philippa, don't be childish. We don't know what this place is—or who these people are——

PHIL.: It's better than Bournequay, whatever it is—and the people can't be much worse.

LADY L.: But we don't know what these people are like. They might kill us——

PHIL.: Why should they? And anyhow, the people in Bournequay were killing me.

LADY L.: I think we ought at least to wait for Sir George and Mr. Cudworth.

PHIL. (*gravely and decisively*): Mother—I'm going straight through there *now*. If you'll come with me, I'll be glad. But whether you do or not, I'm *going*.

ACT I

THEY CAME TO A CITY

LADY L. (*putting a hand on her arm*): Just a minute, Philippa. You're grown-up now——

PHIL.: I'm glad you realise that, Mother.

LADY L. (*slowly*): Yes, I realise it. You're grown-up and I can't prevent you from talking like that or behaving sometimes as if I were only a stupid encumbrance. But I can at least ask you not to be so cruel, not to try to hurt me.

PHIL. (*half impatient, half penitent*): Mother, I'm not.

LADY L. (*with dignity*): Come along, then. (*Turning to JOE, just before leaving.*) If you're staying here a little longer, would you mind telling Sir George Gedney and Mr. Cudworth that my daughter and I have gone down into the city?

JOE: I'll tell 'em.

PHIL. (*to JOE*): I thought you'd have been the first in. Aren't you coming?

JOE: I dunno yet. Might. Might not.

They go through doorway. JOE sits down. There is now full brilliant daylight on the whole scene. After a moment or two SIR G. and CUDWORTH enter slowly, deep in talk.

CUD.: So I said, "You think that's smart, eh?" And he said, "Well, it's good business, isn't it?" So I said, "I don't know about that. Where's your option?" And he said, "Don't worry about that, Mr. Cudworth. I can have that option by to-morrow." And I said, "No, you can't, because it's here in my pocket." You ought to have seen his face.

SIR G.: Serve the fella right. Hello, where is everybody?

JOE: Gone through that doorway. Lady Loxfield and daughter went only a minute since, and told me to tell you.

SIR G.: Door open, eh? Ought to see this place, don't you think, Cudworth? Might be something in your way, eh?

CUD.: Nothing like having a look round. Used to spend my holidays that way. Keeping my eyes and ears open. Picked up a controlling interest that way once in the Tormouth Trams. Sold out afterwards, of course. Trams no good to me.

SIR G.: Quite. Don't blame you. Trams no good to anybody.

JOE: What is any good to you?

CUD.: Trying to be smart?

JOE: Not specially.

CUD.: Never pays with me.

JOE: I dare say. But what *is* any good to you?

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CUD.: Money is.

JOE: Why, what d'you do with it?

CUD.: Make more money.

JOE: So what?

CUD.: Now listen, and don't think you know it all. Have you been kicked about?

JOE: Yes. Plenty.

CUD.: And that young woman along there—I'll bet she's been kicked about too.

JOE: I'll bet she has.

CUD.: Yes, well, I haven't. Why? Too much money. Now—who's laughing?

JOE: Well, I'm not crying.

SIR G. (*going over to him*): But he had you there, though. Must have money. Don't I know it. Going to put this golf club down here. Look a fool wand'ring round a strange town carryin' that thing, eh? Keep an eye on it, will you?

JOE: I don't promise. Are you what they call an aristocrat?

SIR G.: Dunno about that. I'm the seventh baronet, if that's anything. Got an old place in Wiltshire. Landed gentry, I suppose. Why?

JOE: I wasn't sure. But where you people made the mistake was in ganging up with these money boys. You ought to have ganged up with us—the crowd, the mob, the people without any money. I once read a piece by Disraeli where he said that. But you didn't. And it's too late now.

SIR G.: I haven't the foggiest notion what you're talkin' about. Sorry! (*To CUD.*) You know what he's talkin' about, Cudworth?

CUD.: Yes—and he's wrong. I must find a post office, then have a look round.

SIR G.: Right you are! Lead on.

They go out briskly through doorway. JOE sits, looking rather morose. ALICE enters slowly, looking rather miserable too.

ALICE: Hello, Joe.

JOE: Hello, Alice.

ALICE (*hesitating*): I'm sorry I told you to *shut it*, Joe.

JOE: That's all right. I talk too much.

ALICE: No, I went an' lost my temper. I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't thought I was going to like you.

JOE: I know. That's what Ma said.

ACT I

THEY CAME TO A CITY

ALICE: Ma? Oh—her. Here, been talking me over?

JOE: No, she just happened to mention it. Said I disappointed you.

ALICE: Well, you did, Joe. I'll admit it.

JOE (*looking hard at her*): I'm no treat, y'know.

ALICE: If it comes to that, neither am I.

JOE (*still looking*): Oh—yes, you are. I said that to myself the minute I set eyes on you and as soon as I heard you talking. "Joe," I said, "this one's a treat."

ALICE (*secretly delighted*): I'll bet you didn't.

JOE: That's what I said to myself, and I've been thinking it ever since. Look—(*pointing*)—the door's open.

ALICE (*seeing it, excited*): Oh—Joe! Is that where the others have gone?

JOE: Yes.

ALICE: And were you waiting for me?

JOE: I was hoping to see you again.

ALICE: Well, here I am. Come on, Joe. What are we waiting for?

JOE: I told you before—I've seen a lot of places.

ALICE: So have I, for that matter.

JOE: Not the way I have. Sailing in at dawn——

ALICE (*impatiently*): And they looked wonderful—and then when you walked round 'em and had a few beers, they looked terrible. All ribs and running sores. I heard you.

JOE: All right then—you heard me.

ALICE: But it's not going to be like that here——

JOE: How d'you know?

ALICE: Because I feel it isn't. Besides, I've been staring at it for the last half hour and it doesn't look that sort of place. And even if it might be—we're here, aren't we? We might as well move about a bit and make the best of it and see what there is to see. (*With change of tone.*) What's the matter with you, Joe?

JOE: I'm like you. I've had a lot o' disappointments and I don't want any more.

ALICE: Come here, you big silly.

She stands expectantly, and slowly he comes towards her. When he is close, she kisses him, quickly, and when he gives a cry and tries to take her in his arms, she laughs and slips back, eluding him.

Oh—no, you don't.

JOE: What—never?

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

ALICE: Never just here at this time of day.

JOE: Ah—that's different.

ALICE: And never anywhere at any time just by grabbing.

JOE (*slowly, staring at her*): Okay. I'll remember.

ALICE: But you're coming with me to look at the city?

JOE: Yes, I'm coming with you.

ALICE (*happy*): Joe!

She flashes him a smile, then goes through the doorway and he follows her. From the city, down beyond the wall, we hear again the little fanfare.

CURTAIN

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

The set is exactly as we left it, with the door still wide open. But the lighting is different, suggesting the end of day, just as the previous lighting suggested early morning. The lighting is full at first, but a shade less brilliant and more mellow than that at the end of Act I. MRS. BATLEY'S shopping basket and SIR GEORGE'S golf club are just where they were before.

After a moment, SIR GEORGE himself enters through doorway, looks about for his golf club, finds it with pleasure and practises a stroke or two, then sits down and smokes. Then MRS. STRITTON, looking rather hot and bothered, arrives through doorway.

MRS. STR.: Oh—Sir George!

SIR G. (*noticing her, rising*): What? Oh—yes—Mrs. Stritton.

MRS. STR.: Have you seen my husband—Mr. Stritton—up here?

SIR G.: Can't say I have. But I've only just arrived myself.

MRS. STR.: He said if we missed each other, we'd meet up here.

SIR G.: Quite. Well, there's plenty of time, y'know. I'd sit down and take it easy. (*As they do sit down*) Exhaustin' sort of day we've had, really. Cigarette?

MRS. STR.: No, thank you, Sir George. I don't smoke. I've tried several times, just to keep Malcolm—my husband—company, but I've never really enjoyed it. (*Pause.*) Did you like this city?

SIR G.: No, couldn't stand the place.

MRS. STR.: No, I didn't like it either.

SIR G.: Very sensible of you.

MRS. STR.: But I know Malcolm likes it.

SIR G.: Good God! You surprise me. Didn't think he was that sort of chap.

MRS. STR.: What sort of chap?

SIR G.: Well—the sort of chap who'd like this sort of place. In a bank, isn't he?

MRS. STR.: Yes, the West Midland at Leamington.

SIR G.: And a decent steady sort of chap I'd have thought——

MRS. STR. (*eagerly*): Oh, he is.

SIR G.: That other fella now—stoker or mechanic or whatever he

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is—fella who talks so much—well, it 'ud never surprise me if *he* liked this sort of place. Just his style, probably. Saw him once or twice, and he seemed to be enjoyin' himself I must say.

MRS. STR.: He and that waitress girl were pretending to do some work in that funny-looking factory when we had a look at it this morning. Then the next time I saw them they were dancing in those gardens——

SIR G.: What gardens?

MRS. STR.: Didn't you see those gardens where they were all dancing?

SIR. G.: No. Think I must have dropped off after lunch. Don't care about dancing in gardens, though, at any time. And shouldn't have thought your husband was the sort of chap who'd want to go dancing in gardens.

MRS. STR.: No, Malcolm wasn't dancing in the gardens. It was Joe Dinmore and that girl Alice. But I must say Malcolm seemed to be enjoying himself, and absolutely wore me out dragging me round.

SIR. G.: Quite! A little of this sight-seein' goes a long way with me. Always did. Some good-lookin' gals though, down there.

MRS. STR. (*without enthusiasm*): Oh, did you think so? I didn't.

SIR G.: No, don't suppose you would. Like to see a few good-lookin' gals about. But too many people down there for my taste. Fact is, I don't like people. Always enjoyed myself best where there haven't been people. A few decent fellas—old pals—and one or two reliable servants, that sort of thing—but not mobs of people. Have to get away from 'em. Ever try duck-shootin'?

MRS. STR.: Good gracious—no!

SIR G.: No—silly question really. Wasn't thinking. But that's the sort of life. Even when I'm in Town, I like to sit quietly in the club. Sensible old-fashioned club, y'know. Nobody talks, and you can still get a decent glass of wine. But mobs of people—like you get in this place—all bouncing round looking so pleased with themselves—dreadful, dreadful! Hello, here's Cudworth. (CUDWORTH *enters through doorway, looking bad-tempered.*) Well, Cudworth, you look as if you'd had quite enough.

CUD.: I have too.

MRS. STR.: And I must say I don't blame you, Mr. Cudworth.

CUD.: How did you get on, Sir George?

SIR G.: I didn't.

CUD.: Same here.

SIR G.: Wouldn't be paid to spend another day in the place.

Though I must say, there weren't any offers. Rather the reverse, in fact. Fella in that bureau sort of place said to me, "Well, what can you do?" So I said to him, "Well, I used to do a good deal of huntin', and I still do some shootin' and fishin'——" And the fella laughed, and said, "Are you a savage?"

MRS. STR. (*primly*): I'm not surprised. I must say, some of the things I heard and saw quite shocked me. I mean—no proper privacy—and—niceness—or anything. Didn't you notice that, Mr. Cudworth?

CUD.: Up to a point. Don't know about niceness. Not sure what niceness is, and don't care much anyhow. I said at first the place was too fancy, and I was right. But what got me down were the people.

SIR G.: Bit peculiar, eh?

CUD.: Peculiar? Barmy. I said to one chap this morning—chap with a red beard who laughed a lot—I said, "Wouldn't suit me, this, at all. Never get any proper work done." So he said, "What is your work?" I told him. And d'you know what *he* said?

SIR G.: No idea. But I'll bet it was something damned insultin'.

CUD.: He said, "We don't call that work here." So I said, "Well, what do you call it then?" He said, "We call it *crime*."

MRS. STR. (*impressed*): He didn't!

CUD.: He did. And then he said if they caught me at it, I'd be sentenced to a year's road-making.

SIR G.: They're not civilised.

CUD.: Wait a minute. I've hardly started yet. I thought this red-bearded chap must be mad—he looked a bit mad—so I tried someone else, an old fellow who looked serious enough. He asked me if he could do anything for me, and so I said I'd like to meet a few of their prominent business men in same line of business as myself. He didn't seem to understand that, so I explained—just the rudiments—and do you know what *he* did?

SIR G.: Yes. He laughed.

CUD.: Oh no, he didn't. He handed me over to a kind of policeman.

MRS. STR. (*astonished*): Policeman! I didn't notice any policemen.

CUD.: Well, this was a policeman of some sort. And this old fellow explained to him, and this policeman said, "I'll have him analysed, unless he's an old offender." So I said, "Look here, I'm a stranger here. Nothing to do with you. Didn't even want to come here. You leave me alone." So they did.

SIR G.: Well, Cudworth, I must say——

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CUD. (*angrily*): I haven't finished yet. I tell you, I've had a packet down there to-day. This afternoon I saw a row of nice shops they'd just finished decorating, and there was a chap looking at 'em and making notes. So I asked him about them, and said they looked a valuable little property, and so on. He said they were going to build a similar row at the other side of the square. I asked him if everybody knew, and he said they didn't, it was still a secret. So I said, "Well, what about the two of us forming a little syndicate and getting a quick option on the site? Then, with values soon going up and up, we'd make a nice thing out of it." He didn't take that in at first, so I explained the idea.

SIR G.: What happened? Another policeman?

CUD.: No. Worse this time. There's a friend of his walking past, with a whole crowd of school kids. He calls this friend, and the kids swarm round us, so that I can't move. He tells this friend what I've suggested. This friend is some sort of schoolmaster—you can't tell properly what they all are down there—but he was some fancy kind of schoolmaster. Well, this schoolmaster chap asks me a question or two—and I give him some sensible answers—as far as I can, because they're all so damned childish. And then what? *And then what?*

SIR G.: I give it up.

CUD. (*indignantly*): This schoolmaster chap begins lecturing on me—yes, *on me*—while I'm there, and can't get out of this crowd of kids.

SIR G.: Lecturing on you! D'you mean—as if you were a specimen or something?

CUD. (*angrily*): That's it. I *was* a specimen. He said so. Typical acquisitive mentality—or something. Said I used—now what's it?—genuine intuitive power anti-socially because—because—I wanted to compensate a feeling of inferiority!

MRS. STR.: How insulting! What did he mean?

CUD.: You can bet your boots that's what I asked him—sharp. I said, "Look here, I started from nothing, just a little shaver of a clerk that nobody cared about, and I've worked hard and used my wits to get somewhere and be somebody—just to show 'em there are no flies on Fred Cudworth."

SIR G.: Quite! And what did he say to that?

CUD.: Asked me to repeat it and then put it down in a notebook, word for word. Then shook hands and said he was very grateful. I tell you, they're off their rockers. School kids! They're all like school kids. Why——

But he is interrupted by ALICE, who hurries through doorway.

ALICE (*breathlessly*): Joe hasn't come up here, has he?

MRS. STR.: No. I haven't seen him since I saw you both dancing.

ALICE: That's all right then. (*She sits down, out of breath.*) I'll go back and find him when I've had a rest. Crikey—what a day we've had!

CUD. (*sourly*): What a day we've all had!

MRS. STR.: Have you seen my husband?

ALICE: Yes, I passed him on the road. He's talking to some people there. He said he was looking for you.

MRS. STR.: Oh—well—he'll be here soon, I suppose.

ALICE: I also passed Lady What's-it—creeping up the hill. I asked her how she'd got on, and she said she hated it.

CUD.: Well, so do I.

ALICE: You would. But I can't understand her—a woman——

MRS. STR. (*with sudden vehemence*): But *I* hate it.

ALICE (*astonished*): You don't!

MRS. STR. (*with passion, rising*): Of course I do. I hate it, I hate it, I *hate* it. I wish to goodness I'd never set eyes on that beastly city. I loathe every bit of it. I'd like to—to—burn it down.

ALICE (*rising, moving towards her, with quiet passion*): I think I could kill you for saying that.

MRS. STR.: And I loathe you too. You ought to have seen yourself—grinning and screeching and making a fool of yourself—down there!

ALICE (*slowly*): I was having the best day of my life. I was among people who were happy, and I was happy. I was in a wonderful place at last. And all you can do is to spit on it.

SIR G. (*protesting*): Here, I say, young woman——

ALICE (*turning on him*): I'm not talking to you. I wouldn't know how to talk to you. I don't know what you mean.

SIR G.: You don't know what I mean! I talk plain English, don't I? I'll tell you what I mean——

ALICE: When I say I don't know what you mean, I'm telling you that I can't make head or tail of you and so can't talk to you properly. To me you're like something stuffed and in a glass case—both you and Lady What's-it. (*More vehemently.*) And anyhow, I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to her. (*Wheeling round on MRS. STR.*) Yes, you! And I'll tell you what's the matter with you. You're so jealous you can hardly breathe. You're not only jealous of your husband, you're jealous of everybody and everything. You can't enjoy anything unless you grab it for yourself. And you're jealous of other people enjoying

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themselves. I saw you down there, hating it all, jealous of it, trying to spoil your husband's pleasure, turning everything sour——

MRS. STR. (*furious*): Shut up—you—you—don't—— (*She bursts into tears and turns away and sits down.*)

CUD. (*angrily to ALICE*): For two pins I'd box your ears.

ALICE (*fiercely*): You just try, that's all. (*Jeering, almost like a street urchin.*) What about that post office? Haven't you made any money to-day? I met a man with a red beard who'd talked to you. (*Laughs in his face, then moves towards doorway, turning as she reaches it, and speaking quietly now*) I've always hoped, in a silly sort of way, for something wonderful just round the corner. But I never thought there was a place as good as this. I didn't think people had it in them to build a city like this. I never really thought people could work and play together like these people can. I'll do anything for these people. I'd die for this place.

She goes out. MRS. STR. is sobbing quietly well apart from the two men, who look after her and then at each other.

SIR G. (*after a pause, reflectively*): Bloody rude.

CUD. (*angrily*): I wish I had her under my orders for a few weeks.

SIR G.: Dare say you do, Cudworth. But you're taking it a bit hard, aren't you? After all, she didn't tell you that you were stuffed and in a glass case, did she? Matter of fact, I rather like a gal with a bit of a devil in her, y'know. Did you ever run across Buster Clayhorn—used to command the Blues?

CUD. (*rather irritably*): No, I never knew these Army men. I've spent my life in the City.

SIR G.: I know, but I thought you might have run across Buster—might have lent him a few hundreds——

CUD. (*as before*): I'm not a money-lender.

SIR G. (*sincerely*): No, of course not. Sorry! Well—— (*He stops, and rises, because LADY LOXFIELD, looking worn, slowly enters through doorway. MRS. STRITTON, who is sitting well over to left, gives one look to see who it is, then looks away again.*) Ah—Lady Loxfield. Tirin' pull, isn't it? Come and sit down.

LADY L.: Thank you. I ought to have left much earlier, but I couldn't drag Philippa away. And at the end I had to come away without her, but she'll be here soon.

SIR G.: Enjoy yourself down there?

LADY L. (*stiffly*): Certainly not. Perhaps I care too much about certain standards. I've been used to being treated—well—in a certain way—you understand——

SIR G.: Understand perfectly. Know just how you feel.

LADY L.: Such impertinence everywhere too. I enquired about charities, because I've done a good deal of voluntary work in connection with various charities—and the girl began laughing and made some most *impertinent* remarks.

CUD. (*grimly*): She didn't give a lecture on you, did she?

LADY L.: No, of course not.

CUD.: You don't know them here yet then. There was a chap with a red beard . . .

SIR G. (*to stop CUDWORTH'S story*): I was talking about Buster Clayhorn—used to command the Blues—did you know him?

LADY L.: There were some Dorset Clayhorns I knew. Margery Clayhorn married an Australian and they spent several days with us once in the Residency at Tago-Tago.

SIR G.: No, not the same. Buster was one of the Leicester Clayhorns—

CUD. (*sourly*): You sound as if you were talking about cattle.

SIR G.: Nonsense! Talkin' about an old friend of mine.

CUD. (*angrily*): Well, go on then. But what does it matter whether he's a Dorset Clayhorn or a Leicester Clayhorn? I call it an idiotic way of talking about people.

LADY L.: Really, Mr. Cudworth, you seem to be in an extremely bad temper this evening.

SIR G. (*grinning*): He's had a bad day.

LADY L. (*with a trace of malice*): Oh—poor Mr. Cudworth.

CUD.: Don't waste any pity on me. I don't want it. Besides, you may need it for yourself soon.

LADY L.: Indeed! Why?

CUD.: Well, for one thing your daughter isn't out of there yet, is she?

LADY L.: She'll be here any minute now.

CUD.: And when I saw her down there, she seemed to be having the time of her life—

LADY L. (*annoyed*): Well really, Mr. Cudworth. Philippa's young and naturally she enjoys a change. I can't see—

CUD. (*cutting in, sharply*): No, you can't, because you've missed my point. (*Points up*) See that sun. Setting, isn't it? Well, when it *has* set, that door'll be shut, and nobody can get in, and nobody can come out.

LADY L.: In other words, Philippa may be locked in. Thank you, Mr. Cudworth.

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CUD. (*grimly*): Not at all.

LADY L.: I need hardly tell you that you're not behaving——

CUD.: Like a gentleman? I'm not a gentleman. Never pretended to be. Not interested.

LADY L. (*turning to SIR G.*): I suppose they told you how you could get back home, didn't they?

SIR G.: Yes, rather. Did they tell you?

LADY L.: They did. I told them it was the *only* thing I really wanted to know. They didn't like that, of course.

MRS. STR. (*rising and coming to them*): But they didn't tell me.

LADY L.: Didn't they, Mrs. Stritton? Perhaps they told your husband.

MRS. STR.: I'm sure they didn't. And I don't think he'd ask. He—he—didn't want to go back.

SIR G.: Disappointed in him? He dances in gardens!

LADY L.: You don't want to stay in this absurd place, do you?

MRS. STR.: No, I hate it.

SIR G.: Better stick to us then. We know how to get back. Thunderin' good job too!

Enter JOE through doorway, slowly. The four look at him and he leans against the tower or near by, looking at them.

CUD.: Didn't expect to see you coming out.

SIR G. (*with bantering tone*): No, rather not. Thought this place would have been just your style.

JOE (*quietly*): It *is* just my style. In fact it's a lot better than my style.

MRS. STR.: I hope there isn't going to be an argument. I'm getting rather tired of arguments.

JOE: That's all right to me. I don't want any arguing.

CUD.: You seemed to me to like arguing.

JOE: So I do, as a rule. But, you see, to-day hasn't been an ordinary day for me. It's been a most extraordinary day. I've seen something I never expected to see, something I'd given up all hope of seeing.

SIR G.: Really? What's that?

JOE: A city full of healthy people, and busy people, and happy people. A really civilised city.

SIR G.: You say that because you were enjoying yourself. I saw you.

JOE: Yes, I enjoyed myself. I had a good time. But that's because I'd seen a real city at last.

LADY L.: If you don't want any argument, you'd better not say much more, because none of us here agrees with you.

JOE (*looking them over, quietly*): No, I can believe that.

CUD.: Depends partly on where one's come from and what one has to go back to.

JOE: True for you. And you can imagine where I came from and what I've got to go back to. Not much.

CUD.: You said it. Not me.

JOE (*quietly*): That's all right. I'm saying it for you. But there's another difference. You see, all you four—well, you're old-fashioned.

MRS. STR. (*indignantly*): What do you mean—old-fashioned? I'm not old-fashioned.

CUD.: Neither am I. Pride myself on being up-to-date. Have to be, in fact, in my business.

JOE (*shaking his head*): No, no, your minds work in the good old-fashioned style. What you say to yourselves all the time is, "Damn you, Jack—I'm all right."

LADY L. (*indignantly*): Certainly not!

SIR G. (*hurriedly*): No argument now.

JOE: No. No argument. Go on, lady.

LADY L. (*with dignity*): All I wish to say is—that if you're implying that we—at least that I—am quite indifferent to the suffering and distress of other people, you're quite wrong. And I deeply resent the suggestion. I was saying only a few minutes ago that when I enquired about charities in this city, I was laughed at—why, I can't imagine. And I've done a great deal of voluntary charitable work. I've always felt it my duty.

JOE: That's okay. And I'm not saying you're hard-hearted. But in this city they don't believe in that kind of charity. They believe in social justice, and they've got it. That's what you people don't understand. You don't even like the look of it. And if you're sitting pretty yourselves, you don't mind being surrounded by people who are wondering where the next meal's coming from, when the next job'll turn up, how the kids are going to live, how you're going to keep up your strength to see 'em through. That's what I call being old-fashioned.

CUD. (*sharply*): Now wait a minute. I'm an individualist——

JOE (*sharply too*): You're a little pirate—and you know it.

SIR G. (*amused*): That isn't what they called him here. Is it, Cudworth? What was it—a specimen—no——

CUD. (*irritably*): All right, we don't want that all over again.

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Besides, I agree with him about *you*. You're old-fashioned all right.

SIR G. (*comfortably*): Never said I wasn't. I call that a compliment.

CUD. (*with malice*): Even when stuffing and glass cases come into it?

LADY L.: What on earth do you mean?

CUD.: Oh—you came in to it too. She mentioned you.

JOE: Who did?

MRS. STR.: *Your* friend—the waitress.

JOE: Has Alice been up here?

SIR G.: Been and gone. After giving us all the rough edge of her tongue. You'll have to be careful there, young fella.

JOE (*anxiously*): Was she looking for me?

MRS. STR.: Yes. Everybody's been looking for somebody.

CUD.: Well, I'm not. And I've had enough of this. Wasting time. No point in hanging about here. (*To* SIR G.) What about pushing off?

MRS. STR. (*urgently*): No, please wait, then we can all go back together. Much safer.

CUD.: Safer? There's no danger. Just as safe going back as it was coming here.

SIR G. (*to* MRS. STR.): Quite. Well, we can only give you a quarter of an hour. (*To* LADY L. *and* CUD.) Care for a stroll as far as the next tower?

LADY L. (*hesitantly*): I'd like to—but I'm wondering about Philippa.

SIR G.: She'll be here waiting for you. Do her good. Coming, Cudworth? Better stretch our legs or we'll get stiff and that seat's damned hard.

CUD.: I've had enough trapesing round these damned walls.

The three go out left, sauntering slowly.

JOE (*to* MRS. STR.): But it won't be, y'know.

MRS. STR.: Won't be what?

JOE: As safe going back as it was coming here.

MRS. STR.: Why not?

JOE: You wouldn't understand if I told you.

MRS. STR.: Are you trying to frighten me?

JOE: No. You'll be safe enough. You'd be still safer if you were dead.

MRS. STR. (*indignantly*): That's a nice thing to say!

JOE: Oh—I don't know. Haven't you ever wished you were nicely, safely dead, Mrs. Stritton?

MRS. STR. (*in a low voice*): Yes. Sometimes I have.

JOE: I thought you had.

MRS. STR. (*turning on him*): Well, haven't you?

JOE: No, not in that way. Not nicely and safely. But just dead. Once or twice, that's all. When I've felt—— *He stops because MRS. B. slowly comes through doorway, then halts, to look at them. He goes over to her.* Ma, I thought some of these others would want to go back. But not you, Ma. Not you. I'm disappointed, Ma. I thought better of you.

MRS. B.: Now what are yer talkin' about, eh?

JOE: I'm talking about you, Ma. I'd hoped that you at least would want to stay down there and not come creeping back.

MRS. B. (*calmly*): Like to 'ear yerself talk, don't yer?

MRS. STR.: Don't take any notice of him, Mrs. Batley.

MRS. B.: I don't.

MRS. STR.: Did they tell you the way to get back?

MRS. B.: No. I never asked 'em.

MRS. STR.: You'll have to come along with us then.

MRS. B.: Thank yer for the invitation, Mrs. Stritton. But, yer see, I'm not going that way. I'm staying here. I only came to get my basket. I might as well 'ave it.

JOE (*with enthusiasm*): That's the girl.

MRS. STR.: Mrs. Batley, I'm surprised at you.

MRS. B.: 'Ow's that?

MRS. STR.: I thought you said you had a lot of responsibilities—looking after people—keeping your home together—going out cleaning——

MRS. B. (*going for her basket*): That's it. 'Ad years and years of it. Could 'ave done with 'alf a dozen pairs of 'ands sometimes.

MRS. STR.: Well then, you can't leave it all—to stay here——

MRS. B.: 'Oo says I can't? (*She has now taken the basket and returns to go, but stops just in front of doorway.*) As long as I can remember, they've been tellin' me what I can do an' what I can't do. An' no thanks for it neither when I did what I could do. Well, some of 'em can look after themselves for a change. It'll do 'em good.

MRS. STR.: I don't like to hear you talking like that, Mrs. Batley.

MRS. B. (*calmly*): I dare say not. But to-day I feel like speaking me mind, for once.

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JOE: That's right. Go on, Ma.

MRS. B.: Now, down there it was different. They said to me, "Well, what d'yer think of it all, Mrs. Batley?" An' I says, "It's lovely. It's 'ow things should be." An' so it is. When I first saw all them children comin' out o' them fine houses—an' all their mothers lookin' so nice an' smilin'—an' everythin' so clean an' pretty, I could 'ave cried. So I says to 'em, I says, "There don't seem much 'ere for somebody like me to do, but whatever there is to do, let me do it," I says. An' they says, "Thank yer, Mrs. Batley, thank yer very much," they says. Just imagine! As if it wouldn't be a pleasure. "*But*," they says, "you just take it easy a bit, Mrs. Batley," they says. "Take it easy an' 'ave a look round an' enjoy yourself." An' they've given me as nice a bedroom as ever yer saw. All to meself too. First I've ever 'ad all to meself. (*Pauses.*) I fancy I dreamt of it once when I was a girl . . . an' all them bright streets as well . . . an' the gardens . . . an' the children's faces . . . I remember bein' quite upset at the time . . . thinkin' it was nothin' but a dream—just tormenting yerself, as yer might say. But it isn't. It's 'ere. (*Pauses.*) Well, pleased to 'ave met yer, Mrs. Stritton. Be'ave yerself, young man.

She nods and smiles and then goes calmly out. They stare after her.

MRS. STR.: I suppose *you're* delighted.

JOE: Yes. I'm delighted.

MRS. STR. (*with sudden bitterness*): Well, what are you doing here then? Why aren't you still down there? Why aren't you having a lovely time too?

JOE: I have a reason.

MRS. STR. (*after waiting for it*): Well, what is your reason?

JOE (*shaking his head and smiling*): Can't tell *you*.

MRS. STR.: I wonder if there's anybody you *can* tell?

JOE: Yes. With any luck. That's not saying much because I'm usually out o' luck.

MRS. STR.: Most of us are.

JOE: But I have a feeling to-day that I might be lucky. (*Pauses, then looks at her.*) Mrs. Stritton—this is serious. Are you going to give that chap of yours a break?

MRS. STR. (*coldly*): I don't know what you mean.

JOE (*shrugging*): All right. You don't know what I mean. And you won't know what he means. Stonewalling. Well, you'll win. Stonewalling nearly always wins. And then of course it always loses. Because that's all you're left with in the end—stone walls. You wouldn't know what I was talking about, would you?

MRS. STR. (*stubbornly*): No. I haven't the slightest idea. Something silly.

JOE: Some of you pick up any bit of happiness as if it was a chicken—and then wring its neck.

MRS. STR. (*suddenly stormily*): Why do you keep on insulting me?

JOE (*with equal sudden passion*): Because I'm trying to save your life.

MRS. STR.: My life isn't in danger.

JOE: You've got a knife in its throat now.

MRS. STR.: Don't be so beastly. Besides, what's it to do with you? You don't even like me.

JOE: No, but I like life, and don't want to see it poured down the drain like dirty water. (*Looking off, through doorway.*) Your husband's coming now. (*Begins move left.*) I hope when I get back, you'll have got rid of the body. They say that's the most difficult part.

Goes off left. MALCOLM appears through doorway.

MAL. (*eagerly*): Dorothy, where have you been?

MRS. STR. (*coldly*): I've been here, waiting for you.

MAL.: I wish you'd have stayed on. Honestly, Dorothy, I've had some most interesting——

MRS. STR. (*cutting in*): I want to get away from here, I want to go home.

MAL.: But I don't even know the way——

MTS. STR.: Some of the others do. We can go with them. And they'll be going soon.

MAL.: But why should we go? Y'know, if you'd only stayed down there a little longer, and seen——

MRS. STR. (*angrily*): I saw all I wanted to see. And I told you what I thought about it.

MAL.: Yes, but——

MRS. STR. (*vehemently*): I tell you, I hate it, I hate it, I *loathe* it.

MAL. (*distressed*): But why, Dorothy, why do you?

MRS. STR. (*stormily*): I suppose you think it's all so wonderful just because you saw that girl—that waitress woman—bouncing about and enjoying herself——

MAL.: No, of course I don't. I hardly noticed her. She's nothing to do with it. Surely you don't dislike this place simply because somebody else does like it?

MRS. STR.: No, I don't. That's not the real reason, though the very sight of her romping round was enough to put me off.

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MAL. (*with timid persistence*): Well then, what is it you don't like about it?

MRS. STR.: Oh, don't let's start arguing——

MAL.: I don't want to start arguing. I only say—what is it you don't like here?

MRS. STR.: And I told you before, I don't like any of it. It's silly. It's—common.

MAL.: Common? It seems to me very uncommon.

MRS. STR.: You know what I mean, Malcolm. And all of them looking so pleased with themselves.

MAL.: Well, why shouldn't they look pleased with themselves? They've something to look pleased about. I was asking one chap——

MRS. STR. (*cutting in*): And then they've no decent manners. They don't know how to behave properly. And everybody pretending to be as good as everybody else!

MAL.: No, Dorothy, that's not quite true. They have some people—men and women—great thinkers, scientists, artists—that they admire and respect and look after better than we do any of our really great people. They——

MRS. STR. (*cutting in*): Oh, don't go on and on about them. I saw what they're like. I've got eyes and ears as well as you.

MAL.: Not when you don't want to, you haven't.

MRS. STR.: What does that mean?

MAL.: It means that you made up your mind you wouldn't like this city and all the people in it. I don't know why. It was as strange to me at first as it was to you. But I wanted to find out about it, and you didn't. You'd made up your mind. (*He stops.*)

MRS. STR. (*after a pause*): Well?

MAL.: And now you're ready to make up my mind for me. You're trying to make *me* dislike it too. (*Suddenly angry.*) And you can't do that, Dorothy, do you see? I won't have it. I know—I *know*—you just closed your mind, wouldn't try to learn anything, said the first stupid thing that came into your head—anything—*anything*—rather than ever admit you were wrong or try and change yourself or open your heart and mind—and—and be *generous*——

MRS. STR. (*aghast*): You hate me now, don't you, Malcolm?

MAL.: No, I don't. But I easily could. You've done this before. But this is the worst. And I won't be bullied and cheated out of what I think and feel. (*Shouting and pointing.*) I like that place and those people. It's a much better place than we've ever known before.

They're much better people. They're *alive*. They're doing the things I've always wanted people to do. I'm going to help them.

MRS. STR. (*as he moves towards doorway*): Malcolm!

She does not try to stop him but sits down on nearest step and bursts into heavy sobs. He has just got off, but now slowly and irresolutely returns, and slowly goes nearer to her, finally sitting beside her.

MAL. (*gently*): All right, Dorothy. Don't cry.

MRS. STR. (*through her sobs*): You were going to leave me.

MAL.: Well, I haven't left you. I'm here.

MRS. STR. (*subsiding now*): You don't love me.

MAL.: Yes, I do.

MRS. STR.: No, you don't. If you did, you couldn't think of leaving me like that. I couldn't leave you.

MAL.: I haven't left you.

MRS. STR. (*drying her eyes*): I know I'm silly—and sometimes I behave stupidly. Somehow I can't help it. Sometimes I hate myself. Sometimes I wish I was dead. (*Whispering.*) That man, Joe Dinmore, said that. Somehow he knew. He said, "Haven't you ever wished you were nicely, safely dead, Mrs. Stritton?" I don't see how he could know that specially about me, but somehow he did. And that upset me—that and one or two other things he said. It's all been so queer, ever since we came here. You didn't feel it as much as I did. Coming here—and talking to all these people we didn't know—and then going down there, and watching it taking you away from me—and then coming back up here—and waiting. It's been horrible, I think. You don't understand what I've felt about it, Malcolm.

MAL.: Perhaps not. I can't see why—I mean, it's seemed quite different to me. I don't think I'm going to like it when we get back.

MRS. STR. (*immensely relieved, happy*): Oh—Malcolm—you are coming back with me?

MAL. (*sadly*): Yes, I'm going back with you.

MRS. STR.: Oh—darling! (*She kisses him.*) You are good to me. Don't think I don't realise how good you are to me. I think I'd have died if you'd left me.

MAL.: I wouldn't have left you. Yes, I know. I went in there again, but I thought you might follow me in and that then you might have changed your mind.

MRS. STR.: No, I couldn't have done that.

MAL. (*sadly*): No, you couldn't have done that. Well, we'll go back. But I'm afraid I'm not going to like it.

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MRS. STR. (*eagerly*): Yes, you will. You'll forget this. And I'll do everything I can to make it better. We'll try and see more people—the sort of people you like. I'll make friends. No, I know I don't find it easy. But I will—I'll make friends. It'll be different, you'll see. (*Warming up to it.*) We might take that house in the Crescent. Or perhaps you could leave the bank altogether. Malcolm, if we went back with Mr. Cudworth, you might ask him if you could work for him. I'm sure he'd pay you much better than the bank does. Shall I leave you together, or would you like me to say something—

MAL. (*with decision*): I don't want to work for him.

MRS. STR.: Oh—but—Malcolm—

MAL. (*fiercely*): Drop it, Dorothy! I'm coming back. That's enough.

MRS. STR. (*meekly*): Yes, all right, dear.

They sit together, MALCOLM staring out bleakly, while she smiles and strokes his hand. JOE now enters slowly from left, and looks at them sardonically.

JOE: Timed it all right, haven't I?

MAL. (*exchanging a look with him*): Yes.

MRS. STR. (*brightly*): We're just waiting for the others, as I don't know how to get back and neither does my husband. Did you see them?

JOE: Yes. Don't worry, they're coming along.

MAL.: I thought you liked it down there.

JOE: I did.

MAL.: Why come back here then?

JOE: I've been asked that before. I have a reason.

MAL.: I hope it's a good one.

JOE: It is. I didn't know you were a comic.

MAL.: I'm not. Why?

JOE: Heard you making 'em shout with laughter down the road there. What was the big joke?

MAL. (*grimly*): I was explaining our financial system.

Enter CUDWORTH from left briskly.

CUD.: I'm going back. No sense in hanging about here. Waste of time. Not going to wait for those two either. Pair of snobs.

MRS. STR. (*jumping up*): Can we come with you, Mr. Cudworth?

CUD.: Certainly. If you're ready now. (*Going out.*)

MRS. STR.: Well, we are. Aren't we, Malcolm?

ACT II

THEY CAME TO A CITY

MAL. (*grimly*): Yes, but don't forget what I said, Dorothy. No asking for jobs.

MRS. STR.: No, dear, of course not. (*She takes his arm and they begin to go.*)

JOE (*to MALCOLM*): Well, I knew it would happen. But I'm sorry.

MAL.: Thank you. Good-bye.

JOE (*shaking hands*): Oh—you may see me again.

MAL.: It would be all right if I did. But I don't think that's likely.

JOE: You never know. (*Dropping his voice.*) I might remind you then of what you've seen and heard to-day. Don't go cold and dead on it. Keep it warm and alive inside, chum. All the best!

MRS. STR. (*tugging at him*): Malcolm!

MAL.: I'm coming. (*To JOE, hurriedly.*) And all the best to you—chum!

Joe watches them go, thoughtfully. PHILIPPA enters slowly through doorway.

PHIL.: Hello!

JOE: Hello!

PHIL.: That's not my mother who's just gone, is it?

JOE: No. Cudworth and the pair from Leamington.

PHIL.: I'd have guessed they wanted to be off.

JOE: You'd have been right about two of 'em, but wrong about the third—Stritton. He's all right, or soon could be. Your mother's along there with Sir George. By this time they'll have got round to the Derbyshire Snookses or the Hampshire Higginses.

PHIL.: I wouldn't be surprised. Where's your girl?

JOE: If you mean Alice, she'll still down there. But why d'you call her my girl?

PHIL.: Don't be silly. I saw what was on between you from the start. And I noticed the way she was looking at you down there this morning.

JOE: Well, you don't notice her looking at me now, do you?

PHIL.: Why don't you go down and find her?

JOE: Because I've got to stop up here and hope that she finds me.

PHIL.: Why should she do all the running about?

JOE: It's nothing to do with running about. I've got to keep out here, that's all.

PHIL.: Then I'm disappointed in you. I thought a man like you, once you'd found a place like that, wouldn't have let it go for anything. Do you remember what you said this morning? I mean when I

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told you to shut up and not spoil it. When Alice and I said it was all right. Then you said you wouldn't believe it was all right until you'd been inside the place because you'd been taken in before. Remember?

JOE: Sure I remember.

PHIL.: Now you've seen it for yourself, you come back here and say you've got to keep out. It seems to me you're all talk.

JOE: I'm mostly talk. But don't let that worry you.

PHIL.: It doesn't. Why should it? As a matter of fact, nothing's going to worry me now. Quite suddenly I feel I don't give a damn.

JOE: Save that for your mother. She's here too.

Enter LADY LOXFELD. JOE goes through door out of scene.

LADY L.: Well, darling, we're ready to go, and I expect you are too.

LADY LOXFELD and PHILIPPA look at each other.

LADY L. (after a pause): Well, Philippa?

PHIL.: Mother, I'm not coming back.

LADY L.: Don't be absurd, darling.

PHIL.: I'm not coming back. I'm staying here. I came up to tell you I'm staying here.

LADY L.: Quite impossible, darling. Nothing would induce me to stay here. I told you what I thought of the place this morning.

PHIL.: I'm not talking about *you*, Mother. I'm talking about *me*. And I've made up my mind.

LADY L.: You're tired, Philippa.

PHIL. (flaring up): I'm *not* tired. And I'm not absurd. I'm not any of those things you've been telling me I was for years and years, every time I've tried to find some life of my own. I feel cool and calm and sensible, and I know exactly what I want.

LADY L.: You're talking to your own mother now, darling. Not to a stranger. You needn't glare and shout.

PHIL.: I'm sorry, Mother. I didn't mean to. But I can't go back with you. I'd rather die. Going back there would be only a kind of slow death. Those people in Bournequay aren't *real*. They don't want to do anything. They only want to keep on existing, from one meal to the next, from one bit of gossip to the next, from one bedtime to the next. *You* aren't really like that, Mother. Look what you said about going that time to Venice—oh—— But now you're afraid of any sort of change——

LADY L.: And why not? I'm getting old. I've lost your father. I've lost the life we had together. But I do my best to keep what's left——

PHIL. (*cutting in*): Yes, but there isn't anything left worth having. Not even for you there isn't. And for me it's not living at all. And now that I've seen this—been among those people down there—it just wouldn't be possible for me to go back. The children, Mother, the children! When I saw them this morning, I could feel myself coming alive. It was as if something—in my heart—suddenly snapped. I could have cried with happiness. I said to those women who were looking after them, "Please let me stay, and I'll do anything—anything—wash and scrub—I don't care what it is. Only let me stay." And they said I could. They were all so friendly—and so *real*. Oh, Mother, can't you understand?

LADY L.: I can see you're very excited and rather overwrought, darling. I know it's been very dull for you often, living with me. I've tried—in more ways than you know, and often at some self-sacrifice—to make it less dull, more amusing——

PHIL.: Yes, I'm sure you have. But it's not a question of being dull or amused. It's more serious than that. And I'm really a serious person, Mother.

LADY L.: Then if you are, Philippa, I've a right to remind you that serious people have a sense of duty, and that you're my only child, that I've nobody else now but you, and that you have some duty toward me.

PHIL.: And I don't simply want to get away from you. It isn't that at all. Mother, why don't you stay here with me? I've tried your kind of life. Why don't you try my kind of life?

LADY L. (*coldly*): Because I don't think it's your kind of life. And I'm certain it isn't mine. After all, I ought to know better than you do——

PHIL. (*hotly*): You oughtn't to know better than I do. Why should you? I can't see any evidence of it. You don't even really like what you say you like. You only put up with it in a dim sort of way simply because you're afraid of anything else. And I don't call that living. I don't want to leave you, Mother. I hate to think of you going back there—alone.

LADY L.: I'm glad of that. And remember, I'm your mother. I brought you into the world, I loved you and looked after you, I——

PHIL. (*cutting in, but gently*): Yes, Mother, but you didn't bring me into the world simply to keep me away from the world. I must make my own life just as you once made yours. And if now you want to prevent my doing that, Mother, then we must say good-bye—that's all.

LADY L. (*distressed*): No—Philippa—I'm too old to change—I——

PHIL.: Good-bye, Mother.

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Goes forward to kiss her. LADY LOXFELD clings to her, crying.

LADY L. (*crying*): No—no—darling—don't leave me—you can't leave me—I—

PHIL.: I must, Mother. Good-bye.

She breaks loose, and hurries out through doorway. There is a pause, during which LADY LOXFELD stands motionless, pulling herself together. Enter SIR GEORGE. Then slowly she turns towards SIR GEORGE. JOE appears in doorway.

LADY L.: I'm ready to go now, if you are, Sir George.

SIR G.: Yes, certainly, Lady Loxfield. Great pleasure. (*Turns to JOE.*) Stayin' on, eh?

JOE: Looks like it.

SIR G.: That door shuts at sunset, y'know, so better make up your mind soon whether you're going in or staying out.

JOE: I know. But thanks for mentioning it. 'Bye.

SIR G.: 'Bye. (*To LADY LOXFELD.*) This way, I think.

LADY L. (*as they move together*): I think you said you knew the Prescotts?

SIR G.: Knew Tubby Prescott very well. Marv'lous shot, old Tubby Prescott.

LADY L.: He married one of the Murchison girls, didn't he?

SIR G.: Thought he married Jerry Fingleton's sister.

LADY L.: Oh, it's *that* Prescott. But they were never in India.

SIR G.: Tubby went to India—to shoot tiger. Didn't stay there long though.

LADY L.: Now let me think. Wasn't there an Archie Prescott?

SIR G.: That was old Tubby's cousin—great polo player—and that was probably the fella you met in India—

LADY L.: That's it. And he *did* marry a Murchison . . .

By this time they are both out of sight and hearing along the gangway. JOE stands looking down into the city. The light, though good enough for the action, is far less than it was earlier and suggests the end of a sunset. JOE looks anxiously at the door and moves a step or two towards it. He then moves a step nearer.

JOE (*looking at door, muttering*): No—for God's sake!

As he says this, we see that the door is very slowly and massively beginning to close. We hear the sound of running footsteps and JOE hears them too and hurries forward to fling himself against the door. As he reaches it, ALICE desperately scrambles through, and no sooner is she through than it closes with a decisive sound. She leans

against the side, panting and exhausted. JOE looks at her, grinning with nervous pleasure.

JOE: Well, Alice, you made it.

ALICE (*breathlessly*): Don't stand there grinning at me, you damned great ape.

JOE: What d'you want me to do then?

ALICE: Get down on your knees.

JOE: Okay.

Begins to get down on his knees, but she furiously pushes him and he scrambles up again.

ALICE (*furiously*): I could kill you.

JOE: What for?

ALICE: For making me come out.

JOE: Why did you?

ALICE: Because I'm a woman and a damn' fool.

JOE: Go on.

ALICE: I don't go on from there. I've said enough. Too much.

JOE: You liked it down there?

ALICE: You know I did.

JOE: It's good, isn't it?

ALICE: It's what I'd always hoped for, what I'd always believed was somewhere round the corner, if we could only find it. And there it is. I always knew that men and women could live like that, if they tried. Life hadn't to be a dog-fight round a dustbin. We'd made it like that, but it needn't be like that. Here, they start every morning feeling as we only feel for about half an hour every two years, half lit at somebody's birthday party. That's true, isn't it?

JOE: Yes, that's true, Alice.

ALICE: Here, they don't work to keep themselves out of the gutter. They work because they've got something big and exciting to do. They can see their life *growing*. They're building it up. And they're enjoying it all. They're not passing the time waiting for the undertaker. You told us this morning, before we went down there, that you didn't believe in this and that——

JOE: I know. I take it all back. I've seen it for myself.

ALICE: I saw it in your eyes, I heard it in your voice, when we were down there together. Those kids—d'you remember, Joe?

JOE: I shan't ever forget it, not for a single minute, as long as I live, Alice.

ALICE: I must sit down. My knees are going.

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She sits down and he sits by her side. He takes her hand. She leans against him.

JOE: Go on, Alice.

ALICE: Go on! Haven't I said enough? It's about time you started talking.

JOE: Not yet. I've plenty to say. But not yet. You've got to tell me.

ALICE: You make it hard for a girl, I must say, Joe.

JOE: I've taken the hard road too. You'll see. If you can behave like a woman, I can behave like a man. A real woman, a real man.

ALICE: Well, if I hadn't been down there, been amongst those people, I couldn't talk like this. Before, I'd have been shot first. I've always been proud, though you mightn't think it.

JOE: I knew you had. I could see that. I know about you.

ALICE: All right then. I'll tell it all. But be careful. If I hear anything from you that sounds like a laugh, I'll—I'll—kill you—or throw myself off that wall.

JOE: There won't be. What d'you take me for?

ALICE: Before that door opened, when we were all talking up here, I liked you a lot. Only I wished you believed in something. Remember how I lost my temper? That was because you weren't just what I wanted you to be. I don't know if that makes sense to a man but any woman would understand. I was angry with myself as well as with you. Then when we went down there, and we saw what it was like, you were different. You were what I wanted you to be. Your mother must have seen you like that when you were a little boy. You were eager, you were happy, you believed everything you saw and heard. That's true, isn't it?

JOE: Yes, that's true enough.

ALICE: So then—I knew I loved you, Joe. It came in a flash. "This is it," I said to myself. And I knew it was. I hoped you loved me. You looked as if you did.

JOE: I did. I still do.

ALICE: Are you sure?

JOE: Certain.

ALICE: That's all right then. (*She turns her face towards him, and they kiss.*) I don't know how you could, with all those wonderful-looking women all round you down there. Made me feel like something that had crawled out of the dustbin.

JOE: You didn't look it. Besides, that's where I come from too. You looked—with your eyes all shining—what I felt. And that's

something the rest of 'em wouldn't understand. They hadn't come here the way we'd come, Alice. So you were different.

ALICE (*happily*): Oh—you do understand. You see, Joe, I felt then that we'd started something between us it would take a long long time to finish. So when you disappeared, I didn't think much about it. Thought you'd gone off to look at some machinery or whatever you like to look at. But I never thought you'd leave the place. I knew it was what you'd always wanted. It was our place. And we could stay there. They'd told us that. So I didn't worry about you, until it began to get late, and then I started looking for you and asking about you. And nobody seemed to know. Until I saw Mrs. Batley—and she said you were up here—waiting for me, she said. So I ran and ran and just managed it. I was blazing wild—you heard me—but I had to come out, if you'd come out. It wouldn't have been the same at all without you. I had to be with you, Joe.

JOE: That's what I'd hoped. That's why I waited and waited.

ALICE: But why? Why?

JOE: I daren't go back once I'd made up my mind and come out. There were some nasty cracks about that, but I had to take 'em. You see, I felt if I went back, you'd persuade me to stay—or even if you didn't I'd never have guts enough to come out again.

ALICE: But what's the matter with you? Why shouldn't you stay? For God's sake, don't tell me now that this isn't what you wanted either.

JOE (*rising with urgency*): No, no. Don't you see—somebody's got to go back.

ALICE: No, I don't see. Some of them have gone back, haven't they?

JOE: Of course they have. I expected that. Cudworth's gone back, Mrs. Stritton's gone back and taken her husband with her—poor devil. Sir George and Lady What's-It have gone, even though Lady What's-It had to lose her precious daughter. Yes, they've all gone. And what good is it going to do anybody that they have gone? If they ever say a word about this place, they'll swear blind that it's terrible. So somebody's got to go back and tell the truth about it.

ALICE: And that must be the bloke I go and fall for and tack myself on to. It just would have to be.

JOE: Yes, it must. That's just what it must be.

ALICE: All right, I was trying to be funny. Tell me what you mean?

JOE: I mean, you wouldn't want a chap who could keep this to himself.

ALICE: I see.

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JOE: You said you had to come out because I'd come out—

ALICE: Yes, because I'm a woman. That's how it takes you.

JOE: And I say, because I'm a man—and not just a monkey—I've got to go back and tell them all what we've seen here. Before, I knew what was wrong—you heard me—but what was the use of me getting up and spouting about it when I didn't know if it could ever be put right?

ALICE: And because you know now——

JOE: I've got to tell them. I've got to keep on telling 'em—day and night—wherever I am——

ALICE: Wherever *we* are——

JOE: Wherever *we* are, I've got to tell them.

ALICE: *We've* got to tell them. But how do we get back?

JOE: How did we come here? Some kind of miracle got us here to give us a test, and if we've passed that test and are ready to go it'll get us back all right. But it's not going to be easy, y'know, Alice. It'll be a hard road. Some of 'em'll laugh and jeer just because they don't *want* anything different. They're frightened of losing some miserable little advantage they've schemed and worked for. They think they can't enjoy their own health unless they know that a lot of other people are dying on their feet. They don't want to lose the whip-hand they've got over somebody. They'd rather have their little privilege and prestige in an ashpit than take a chance and share alike in a new world. Some of 'em, poor creatures, are so twisted and tormented inside themselves that they envy and hate other people's happiness. And we'll have to talk to plenty of them.

ALICE: I can see this isn't going to be easy, Joe. It's going to be tough.

JOE: You don't know the half of it yet. Then there are all the smart boys—the kind I was—who've had to take plenty and know it's all rotten, but won't have it that you can see anything any better. They get big laughs at your expense. I know. I've been one of 'em. And there are plenty of them too. And that's not all, Alice. There'll be days—rainy days—dark days—when nobody wants to listen, when the butcher hasn't been paid and the grocer looks at you sideways and you've nothing to smoke and they're asking you when you're moving on to the next town—and *then*—we shan't be sure ourselves we were ever here——

ALICE: Joe—the light's going. We must have one last look. (*They go to look, etc.*) All the lights are coming up along the terraces and in the gardens. Joe, we could never forget the gardens.

JOE: We'll not forget any of it.

ALICE (*after pause*): Joe—couldn't we stay after all?

JOE: *You could. I must go.*

ALICE: You're not going without me.

JOE: Then you can't stay.

ALICE (*calling down quietly*): Good-bye, my lovely city. I don't know when I'll ever see you again. (*She breaks down.*)

JOE (*comforting her*): Now Alice—take it easy, kid——

ALICE (*through her sobs*): I don't want to go. . . . And it'll seem worse than ever when we get back.

JOE: No, it won't. Because, to begin with, we'll remember. That's why we've got to go back—because we're the ones who've been—and seen it all. . . . And then we'll hope. And keep on hoping. And every time we find a spark of hope and vision in anybody, we'll blow it into a blaze. . . . They will tell us we can't change human nature. That's one of the oldest excuses in the world for doing nothing. And it isn't true. We've been changing human nature for thousands of years. But what you *can't* change in it, Alice—no, not with guns or whips or red hot bars—is man's eternal desire and vision and hope of making this world a better place to live in. And wherever you go now—up and down and across the Seven Seas—from Poplar to Chungking—you can see this desire and vision and hope, bigger and stronger than ever, beginning to light up men's faces, giving a lift to their voices. Not every man, not every woman, wants to cry out for it, to work for it, to live for it and if necessary die for it—but there's one here, one there, a few down this street, some more down that street—until you begin to see there are millions of us—yes, armies and armies of us—enough to build ten thousand new cities——

ALICE (*looking up*): Like our city?

JOE (*triumphantly*): Yes, like our city. Where men and women don't work for machines and money, but machines and money work for men and women—where greed and envy and hate have no place—where want and disease and fear have vanished for ever—where nobody carries a whip and nobody rattles a chain. Where men have at last stopped mumbling and gnawing and scratching in dark caves and have come out into the sunlight. And nobody can ever darken it for them again. They're out and free at last. "I dreamt in a dream I saw a city invincible to the attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth, I dreamt that was the new city of Friends."

ALICE (*quietly*): Come on Joe, let's get going . . .

As they move, and the last light begins to fade, we hear the fanfare again.

END OF PLAY

[201]

DESERT HIGHWAY

A Play in Two Acts and an Interlude

NOTES ON THE CHARACTERS

SERGEANT JOSEPH is a well-built, thoughtful Jew of the best type, aged about thirty. His ascendancy over the other men is due to his personality rather than to his rank; he has no Jewish accent, but speaks as an ordinary London secondary school boy would speak. He is a sensitive fellow but very virile.

CORPORAL PHILIP DONNINGTON is a public school and university man, also about thirty. He ought to have a commission but cannot be bothered and does not want any responsibility. Is the kind of educated man who wanders from job to job, and rather likes low company and probably drinks too much in civil life. Indifferent and cynical. Preferably of rather slight physique.

“KNOCKER” ELVIN is a Cockney of the Cockneys. Old enough to have fought in the last war. Old soldier. Does anything in civil life. Ought to be a sergeant at least but prefers to be a private. Physically and mentally very tough. But temperamental.

HERBERT SHAW is a hefty, solemn West Riding working-class type, in his late twenties. Slow and stubborn. Speaks with marked Yorkshire accent.

ILLTYDD HUGHES is a dark, quick Welshman, in his early thirties, very temperamental. Very Welsh in accent and manner and general outlook.

GEORGE WICK is a fresh-faced country lad, easily the baby of the party. with something very young and innocent and pleasantly foolish about him. About twenty. Preferably should speak with something like a Gloucestershire accent, but any not too marked rural accent will do, so long as it is not North-country or Welsh.

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CHARACTERS

SERGEANT BEN JOSEPH
CORPORAL PHILIP DONNINGTON
TROOPER ("KNOCKER") ELVIN
TROOPER HERBERT SHAW
TROOPER ILLTYDD HUGHES
TROOPER GEORGE WICK

ACT I

During the present war. Evening

INTERLUDE

The same place, about the year 703 B.C.

ACT II

During the present war. Next morning

The scene is a hollow near an old highway in the Syrian Desert, where—it is assumed for the purpose of this play—a campaign is being fought.

Desert Highway—Copyright, 1944, by J. B. Priestley

“Desert Highway” was first produced at the Theatre Royal, Bristol, on December 13th, 1943, with the following cast:

SERGEANT BEN JOSEPH	SERGEANT STEPHEN MURRAY
CORPORAL PHILIP DONNINGTON	SERGEANT JOHN WYSE
TROOPER (“KNOCKER”) ELVIN	PRIVATE STANLEY ROSE
TROOPER HERBERT SHAW	GUNNER GEORGE COOPER
TROOPER ILLTYDD HUGHES	WARRANT OFFICER EMMILYN JAMES
TROOPER GEORGE WICK	SAPPER CLIVE BAXTER

The play produced by MAJOR MICHAEL MACOWAN

Afterwards produced in London at The Playhouse in February, 1944

ACT I

The set can be more or less elaborate according to the circumstances of production. These notes assume a full stage and ordinary theatrical equipment. Right (actors'), part of a Grant tank can be seen, but it is not necessary that the actors should be seen going in and coming out of it. Behind, running right round to left, is a low near ridge of sand and rock, with nothing but the sky behind it. Prominent, upstage centre, is a piece of worn carved stone, less than a foot high, suggesting a buried stone monument of some kind. Some rocks, sand mounds, can be built at back so that they can be walked or sat on. Total impression is that of a harsh desert. Rather hard bright evening light. Various equipment—blankets, ground sheets, etc.—has already been brought out of the tank, suggesting that the men intend to spend the night here. At left, HUGHES and WICK are putting up a small desert tent, which must be so contrived that anybody going into the tent can leave the stage unseen by the audience. All the men wear desert clothes, and though deeply sun-burned, look dusty, tired, and short of sleep. HUGHES and WICK talk as they put up the tent.

HUGHES: So I said to myself—I said—"Iltydd Hughes," I said, "you are going to have bad luck this time," I said.

WICK: I don't believe you can tell if you're going to have bad luck.

HUGHES: Certainly you can tell—if you have the gift. My grandmother had the gift—she was *terrible*. So was my Uncle Thomas.

WICK: I've got an Uncle Thomas. Runs a baker's and confectioner's in Moreton-in-the-Marsh.

HUGHES: It's not a business I would care to be in—baking. Gets you up too early in the morning.

WICK: You have to get up early on a farm too. I was used to it.

HUGHES (*rather proudly*): I have worked on a farm. It belonged to my cousin—in Mid-Wales. I went there for my health when I was seventeen. "An outdoor life for you, my boy," they said. "Yes, an outdoor life." So I had an outdoor life. And now I'm having another outdoor life.

WICK (*after a pause*): I say—Taff—— (*Hesitates.*)

HUGHES: Whatever you are going to say, Georgie—don't call me Taff. I don't like it. Hughes—or Mister Hughes as it often was in

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Civvy Street—or Illtydd—I don't mind. I don't care if you call me nothing at all. But not Taff. It sounds like Elvin—and I don't like the man.

WICK: Okay. Sorry.

HUGHES: But you were going to ask me something, I think, Georgie—eh?

WICK (*dropping his voice*): That's right. But I was only going to ask—d'you think we're all right here?

HUGHES (*flustered*): All right here? Certainly we're all right here—I suppose. (*From dubiousness now to alarm.*) Why shouldn't we be all right? Nothing wrong with us, is there! The tank's broken down—temporarily, I suppose, quite temporarily—but we've plenty of rations and water—and we can have a nice little rest. All right? Certainly—we're all right.

WICK (*who catches final tone of doubt*): Sergeant Joseph knows all about it, doesn't he?

HUGHES: Of course he does. He's one of the very best.

Enter ELVIN from behind tank. He acts as cook to the party and can now be bringing in some rations.

ELVIN (*boisterously*): Got the ol' tent up, eh? Good job your mother doesn't know about this little packet, Georgie. Fed up, mucked up, an' far from 'ome—that's us.

HUGHES (*indignantly*): Why do you talk to him like that?

ELVIN: What's the matter with you, Lloyd George?

HUGHES (*furiously*): I'm telling you, Knocker Elvin—

ELVIN (*angry now*): Don't call me Knocker. Only my Chinas—like young Georgie 'ere—call me Knocker—see?—any little Welsh mucker can't call me Knocker. As soon as the Sarge tells me oo's in this bleedin' party, I says "For Gord's sake, leave Taffy out," I says—" 'cos 'e'll bring a packet, 'e will. First thing yer knows, Sarge," I says, "something'll break down or get mucked up, just mark my bleedin' words," I says. An' 'ere we are.

VOICE OF SERGEANT JOSEPH (*from inside tank*): Knocker!

ELVIN (*calling*): Yes, Sergeant?

VOICE OF JOSEPH (*sharply*): We're hungry. Get cracking.

ELVIN (*calling*): Ready when you are, Sergeant. 'Ere, give me a 'and, Georgie.

They go out right. HUGHES watches them go with marked distaste, and messes about, tidying up the equipment for a moment. Then DONNINGTON enters, as from the tank.

DONNINGTON: That's the quietest radio set I ever listened to. You

can't even catch a crooner. (*He produces a packet of cigarettes. HUGHES comes nearer and stares at them, and DONNINGTON sees him.*) All right, you'll be giving yourself eye-strain in a minute. Here you are. (*Tosses him a cigarette. They light up.*)

HUGHES: I am very much obliged to you, Corporal Donnington. Very much obliged to you.

DONNINGTON (*ironical but not unfriendly*): Don't mention it, Trooper Hughes, don't mention it.

HUGHES: I have sometimes thought it would be much better not to smoke at all—like young Georgie—because then if I didn't smoke at all I wouldn't miss it if I had nothing to smoke—if you see what I mean, Corporal.

DONNINGTON: No difficulty at all in following that thought. I feel the same about whisky. If you'd never had it, you'd never miss it. And anyhow I could never really afford it. Born too late. My father had all the luck—except when he produced me. Ever have any trouble with your father, Hughes?

HUGHES (*rather startled*): Oh—no—no trouble at all. He was very nice, my father. But he's dead now.

DONNINGTON: So is mine, only he doesn't know it.

HUGHES (*startled again*): But—if he was dead now——

DONNINGTON: No, don't thrash it out. Leave it.

HUGHES (*solemnly*): No, I see now what you mean, Corporal. You know, I have often thought you are a bitter man.

DONNINGTON: Yes, yes—a cynical type.

HUGHES: I think you have had some trouble with a woman.

DONNINGTON: I think so too. As a matter of fact I saw her last week.

HUGHES (*astounded*): You saw her? But how could you see her?

DONNINGTON: Captain Fawcett—I knew him slightly before the war—let me look at an old copy of the *Tatler* he had. She was in it. Doing something nice and fancy for the Red Cross—for our gallant boys overseas. You're one of our gallant boys overseas, you know. How d'you feel?

HUGHES: I should like very much to be at home hearing about it on the wireless.

DONNINGTON: Let me get back and I won't listen to it on the wireless. I've had enough listening on *this* wireless—and hearing nothing. Which means that nobody knows where we are, and we don't know where anybody else is.

HUGHES: The recce planes can spot us.

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DONNINGTON: Yes, but whose recce planes? The wrong lot may spot us first. However, it's no use worrying about that.

HUGHES: No, I was saying to young Georgie that we have a good man, one of the very best, in Sergeant Joseph.

DONNINGTON: Yes, that's our only bit of luck. It might have been that fool, Stanners, or that belly-ache, Nash. Ben Joseph's a bit too solemn for my taste, but he does know his stuff.

HUGHES: Certainly, one of the very best. And yet I heard Elvin calling him a teapot.

DONNINGTON: That's all right. Knocker's a real Cockney and uses the old rhyming slang. "Teapot" is short for "teapot lid", and that's rhyming slang for "Yid". In other words, Knocker's only saying in his elaborate way that our sergeant is a Jew. That's why he takes this war so seriously, because he's a Jew. I might do the same myself if I were a Jew.

HUGHES: There are some Jews in my town, but they weren't like the sergeant—very different they are.

DONNINGTON: Well, there are all kinds of Jews, y'know—fat and thin, rich and poor, noisy and quiet ones, some in the front line, some in the Black Market—like the rest of us. Only, perhaps, a bit tougher.

HUGHES (*seriously*): It is a great pleasure to me to listen to an educated man like yourself, Corporal. Cambridge, no doubt?

DONNINGTON: Oxford, if we must mention it.

HUGHES: My cousin Aneurin is studying at the University of Wales—at Bangor.

DONNINGTON: He's probably in ITMA by this time. Were you with us when Ben Joseph—he was only a corporal then—won the middle-weight championship of the two armoured divisions for us?

HUGHES: No, but I heard of it. Both Elvin and Shaw have told me all about it.

DONNINGTON: They wanted to give him a job in Cairo, just to keep him boxing, but he turned it down. In fact, he said he'd never do any more fighting—except the military kind. He got a bit solemn after that. But he's all right.

Enter SHAW, as from tank. He is very dirty.

SHAW (*indicating tank*): Bloody 'opeless.

Sits down heavily.

DONNINGTON (*mockingly*): Our 'Erbert from Ossett—our sweet little ray of sunshine!

SHAW: Well, if it's bloody 'opeless, what's good o' saying it isn't? It'll take lads in t'workshops all their time to get her goin' again.

HUGHES: What's happened to her?

SHAW: Everything's 'appened. To start wi', steering box is a proper muck-up. There was something wrong wi' yon tank when we took 'er over. I said so from t'start, didn't I, Corporal?

DONNINGTON: Certainly, Herbert. Ever since I've known you, you've been passing on bad news—and enjoying it. Are they all like you in Ossett?

SHAW (*grimly*): Ah don't know—but ah wish ah wor back to find out. An' ah could ha' been reserved if ah'd gone t'engine room at Ackroyd's—same as me father said—but o' course ah took no notice.

DONNINGTON: Is your father like you, Herbert?

SHAW (*seriously*): Oh no, me father's a more serious sort o' chap. An' me grandfather's more serious still.

DONNINGTON: He must be carved out of granite.

SHAW: He's a big man at t'chapel, me grandfather is.

HUGHES: So was mine.

SHAW: Ay, but it's diff'rent up ahr way.

DONNINGTON: If ever I get out of this, I must have a look at Ossett.

SHAW: Ay, but we're not aht of it yet. Sergeant's trying t'wireless again.

DONNINGTON: I couldn't get a thing out of it.

SHAW: Eee—ah'm 'ungry.

DONNINGTON: We'll be eating in a minute, but don't think too much about it. We'll have to go easy on the rations.

SHAW (*aghast*): What for?

DONNINGTON: Because we're stuck here and can't get away, and it may be a few days before anybody finds us. So work that out, Herbert.

ELVIN and WICK now appear with food and tea, and the others get ready to feed, and ELVIN begins dishing out the food, throughout the following dialogue.

ELVIN: Well, 'ere it is, chummies, what there is of it. An' don't blame me if yer 'ear it rattle inside 'cos the sarge tells me to cut it down—see? An' yer can use yer common about that, Yorky, an' stop lookin' as if it's my muckin' fault we're abaht two hundred miles from the Quarter-bloke an' another two hundred from the nearest Naffy.

SHAW (*gloomily*): Proper muck-up.

ELVIN: Go orn, Yorky. You blokes ought to 'ave 'ad some o' the scran we 'ad in the last war, when there wasn't this Lord Whoozit

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dishing up a nice tin o' this an' a nice tin o' that for the boys, when they gives yer biscuit an' bully, bully an' biscuit till yer teeth was worn dahn an' yer bleedin' at the gums—iron rations 'alf the muckin' time, an' iron rations was iron all right them days. You blokes is livin' in Lyons Corner 'Ouse now only yer don't know it.

WICK: I went to one of them once. There was a band playing.

ELVIN: I'll bet there was, Georgie boy. An' some nice little bits to dish out the chow, eh? Well, take yer mind right off it, Georgie (*Calling.*) It's up, Sergeant. (*To the others, now sitting round.*) Just take a butcher's at it first.

HUGHES: What butchers?

ELVIN: Yer so ignerant I can't talk to yer, Taffy. I meanersay, take a nice long look at it first—'cos it's not polite to start eatin' before the sergeant's 'ere, an' what's more important—yer'll 'ave to spin it out—see? (*As SERGEANT JOSEPH enters, as from tank, looking rather tired and concerned*) 'Ere y'are, Sergeant. All dished up an' waitin' for the word o' command. An' I've told these blokes we got to spin it out a bit.

JOSEPH (*taking his portion*): That's right, Knocker. (*Looking at his portion.*) Here you've given me too much. Take some of this back. I'm not very hungry.

SHAW: Not 'ungry! I could eat a horse.

ELVIN: Betchercould, Yorky. But yer couldn't eat ol' Lizzie there. (*Points to tank.*) That's where we bin mugs, see. We oughter stuck to 'orses.

WICK: But you haven't ever eaten horse, have you, Knocker?

ELVIN: Eaten 'orse! Gahrblimey, I've eaten dozens o' bleedin' 'orses—wiv chips an' cabbage.

HUGHES: You must think, man, we believe anything you tell us.

ELVIN (*contemptuously*): Oh—turn it up, Taffy. Yer ignerant—never bin anywhere—never seen anything—whazza-use o' talkin' to you.

DONNINGTON (*to HUGHES*): Knocker's not kidding you. I've eaten horse. It's like beef—only coarser and a bit sweeter—

ELVIN: 'At's right. The corporal knows. Eddicated man, see. 'E's 'ad 'orse. So've I, dozens of 'em. Ol' Derby winners, some of 'em. An' dahn at ol' Ma Pellini's, just off the Mile End Road—yer could 'ave jockeys on toast wiv 'em.

Throughout this dialogue they are eating, and dishing out the second course, etc.

WICK: I'd like to go to this Ma Pellini's you're always talking about, Knocker.

ELVIN: Take yer there soon as we're back in Civvy Street, me ol' China. Best caff in the East End, Ma Pellini's is. Serve yer anything there—any blinkin' thing yer fancy—if yer know 'ow to ask for it. One ol' bloke—keeps a furniture shop back o' Stepney Green—used to go there re'ler—an' plenty o' nicker, see—an' this ol' bloke 'ad to 'ave sheep's 'ead every time. Taffy, it'd 'a' frightened yer blinkin' life aht ter see 'im there every time with 'is sheep's 'ead front of 'im—

TAFFY (*rising to it, angrily*): Why should it have frightened me to see him with a sheep's head?

ELVIN (*guffawing*): Yer might ha' thought it one o' your relations—

TAFFY (*furiously*): I'll knock your face in, you Knocker, you—

SHAW: Steady on, lads.

ELVIN (*contemptuously*): Ow—'im! 'E couldn't—

JOSEPH (*sharply*): Drop it, Knocker. And don't let's have any more of it. And don't you listen to his nonsense, Hughes. He's only trying to make you lose your temper.

HUGHES: I am a very quiet man, Sergeant—and not at all quarrelsome—but if he starts—

JOSEPH: All right. Just stay quiet, that's all. You too, Knocker.

ELVIN (*quite good-humouredly*): Every time, Sarge.

JOSEPH (*looking round at them, slowly*): You're not in camp now. You're out in the desert—and a long way out in it. A lot of things could happen to us, the spot we're in now. Even if there was any sense in it—and there isn't—we haven't energy to waste on meaningless quarrels. So we'd all better be quiet men for a day or two.

He produces a Service notebook and begins writing in it, rather slowly.

DONNINGTON (*after a pause*): Writing a report?

JOSEPH: Yes. If we're lost here—as we seem to be just now—I want to show them that it wasn't our fault. We went the way we were told. We haven't got to the rendezvous because of this break-down, of course, but if the others had gone the right way, we wouldn't be clean out of touch as we are now. I think they went wrong this side of Asmar Oasis.

SHAW: Same 'ere, Sergeant. Ah said so 'at time, didn't ah?

DONNINGTON: That's Stanners and Nash—knowing it all, as usual.

JOSEPH: When did you first complain to me about the steering, Shaw?

SHAW: About middle o' t'morning. Ah said then there wor summat up with 'er.

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JOSEPH (*writing*): Yes, I remember. Well, I'll get this report straight, as far as it goes.

They are smoking now, after their meal. After a pause, DONNINGTON begins, slowly and rather bitterly.

DONNINGTON: I could do a nice report on this set-up. A nice sweet little report.

ELVIN: I'll buy it, Corporal.

DONNINGTON (*slowly, as before*): Lost—in the Syrian Desert—a few thousand miles from home—six bloody fools and a broken-down tank. The rest of the division having taken the wrong turning. But only after about a thousand million idiots took the wrong turning.

WICK: I don't see that, Corporal. Who's this thousand million you're talking about?

ELVIN: All the blokes 'at goes an' 'as a flamin' war all over again—see? Use your loaf, Georgie boy. Carry on, Corp.

DONNINGTON (*as if enumerating*): In charge—Sergeant Ben Joseph—Military Medal—of London—formerly skilled craftsman employed by the Scientific Instrument Company—and if he'd had any sense he'd have been with 'em yet, as he easily could have been.

JOSEPH (*looking up*): All right—that's enough about me. You're next. Corporal Philip Donnington—go on——

DONNINGTON: Also of London—formerly journalist, advertising agent's tout, publicity man for three restaurants and two night clubs——

ELVIN: Blimey—I knew you'd seen a bit o' life, Corp. Two night clubs! Cor lumme—an' pickin' up some nice lolly too, I'll be bound. Wotdger want ter go an' get yerself landed in this packet for?

DONNINGTON: I told you, I'm one of six bloody fools. I ought to have been talking about you for the B.B.C. (*mimicking broadcaster*): "I want to talk to you to-night about our brave fellows in the Middle East——"

SHAW: I'd tell 'em summat if they'd let me 'ave a go.

ELVIN: They'd take you for a bleedin' comedian, Yorky. 'Appidrome, that's you.

SHAW (*glumly*): Happy-nothin'.

DONNINGTON: Then there's Trooper Knocker Elvin—also of London—old sweat—knows what it's like and yet hasn't the sense to keep out of it again——

ELVIN: That's me. No common—as per usual.

DONNINGTON: And what were you before you joined up?

ELVIN (*evasively*): I did this an' that. I got arahnd an' enjoyed meself.

DONNINGTON: Trooper Herbert Shaw—of Ossett—formerly employed, I believe, in the engine room of a textile mill. Must join up. Must come out here. What for?

SHAW: Ah know, ah know. Ah might ha' been poppin' into t'Are an' 'Ounds now for a pint, afore doin' a bit o' courtin'—

WICK (*grinning*): Which one would it have been to-night, Herbert?

JOSEPH (*smiling, looking up*): Has he got more than one girl?

WICK: He's got two—haven't you, Herbert—and he can't decide which he wants. There's Nelly, the thin one in the tobacco shop—and Olive, the fat one at the confectioner's—

SHAW: Nay, she's not fat. Ah never said she wor fat. Ah only said she wasn't so thin as Nelly. Ay, an' ah think it 'ud ha' been Olive's turn to-night. Aaa! (*Sighs.*) Ah 'adn't sense ah wor born wi'.

DONNINGTON: Trooper Illtydd Hughes—of some unpronounceable place in Wales—where I don't know quite what he did—

HUGHES (*eagerly*): Worked for my uncle—builder and contractor—reserved occupation really—and very very nice business, growing all the time, it was, before the war. I quite agree with you, Corporal—no sense in us at all to be here.

DONNINGTON: Then Trooper George Wick—just off the farm and really just out of the egg—from Little Muddlem—

WICK (*seriously, correcting him*): Long Micklem. I keep on telling you, Corporal, but you won't get it right. It's Long Micklem. And we've got the best farm there. It's been hundreds of years in our family. One day I'll have it.

HUGHES: Touch wood.

ELVIN: Garn—'e don't need to touch no wood, Georgie don't. Superstutious—that's what you are, Taffy. Superstutious, see? An' it all comes of bleedin' ignerance—now then—

HUGHES (*angry again*): Ignorant yourself, you loud-mouthed Cockney, you—

DONNINGTON (*with authority, sharply*): Turn it up, you two! I haven't finished my nice little report yet.

JOSEPH (*looking up from writing*): It seemed to me to peter out even worse than my report.

DONNINGTON: Now wait. The afore-mentioned B.F.s now sitting in the desert may be discovered there by the enemy. If they are, either they will be killed—which will be the end of them—or they'll be taken prisoner, to live a degraded sort of existence for a few years before

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being returned to a country that's forgotten them. If, on the other hand, they are found by their own side, they will be required almost immediately to take part in similar idiotic expeditions. But if these six are found by neither side——

JOSEPH (*quietly, but decidedly*): All right, Phil, you needn't go into that.

ELVIN (*who has been thinking this over*): Cheerful sort o' chummie, you are, Corp'ral, aren't yer? My bleedin' oath, you are!

SHAW: Ah agree wi' every word 'e said. An' ah feel better nah 'e's said it. Me an' the corporal thinks alike.

JOSEPH (*now coming into the talk*): No you don't. Not really. But you both enjoy making the worst of things.

WICK: Herbert does. Grumbles like hell all the time, an' makes me feel low sometimes.

JOSEPH (*taking charge now*): Now let's have another look at this soldiering business. We're all fools for being here, eh?

HUGHES: Certainly we are, Sergeant Joseph. No doubt of that whatever.

ELVIN: If I 'eard my ticket was waiting for me down at the base—desert or no bleedin' desert—I'd start runnin' for it now.

JOSEPH: You would, Knocker, eh?

ELVIN: I would, Sar'n't. Gone with the flamin' wind—that 'ud be me.

JOSEPH: And yet I happen to know, Knocker, that you were offered a permanent job down at the base, on account of your age and service, and that you turned it down—to come up here.

ELVIN (*apologetically*): That's diff'rent. If I'm goin' ter soldier, then I'm goin' ter soldier—see—an' no char-wallah stuff at the base—I like to be up the line with the real boys—see. I done it before—(when some of you blokes was wettin' yer mother's hearth-rug)—an' I can do it again—never mind if I am in a desert or on a bleedin' iceberg. But show me me ticket——

JOSEPH (*loudly, affectionately*): Go on, you old liar. If I showed you your ticket now—you wouldn't have it.

ELVIN: You couldn't run fast enough to take it away from me——

JOSEPH: I see. And if they'd sent transport for you, then you'd just climb in, say good-bye, and leave us here to get on without you, eh?

ELVIN (*embarrassed by this argument*): Oh—well—'ave a bit o' common, Sar'n't—they wouldn't send transport for me an' not for the rest of you—so it just couldn't, 'appen. But I say——

DONNINGTON (*breaking in*): It doesn't matter what you say,

KNOCKER. We know it's all talk. You needn't have been here at all. But then—you've got it badly—you can't keep away from soldiering—you're practically barmy—so you don't count. If there is an argument, you can be left out. But what *is* the argument, Ben?

JOSEPH: Well, you say—and they all agree with you—that we're fools to be here. Right?

DONNINGTON: Right.

JOSEPH: And I say—let's take a look at it. What's the alternative to fighting, to being fools out here? Well, we might have all packed up. In 1940, say, when they expected us to. I don't know where some of you would have been then—working for the Nazi bosses probably— - but I know that, being a Jew, I'd have been in a concentration camp—that is, if they'd taken me alive—which they wouldn't have done—

SHAW (*indignantly*): Nah then, steady on, Sergeant. They wouldn't ha' got me workin' for any bloody Nazis. We don't like them sort o' folk up i' Yorkshire.

HUGHES (*excitedly*): If England had given in, Wales would have gone on fighting by herself—under Lloyd George perhaps—

ELVIN (*with great emphasis*): 'Ere, 'alf a minute, you blokes—'oo d'yer think you are? What abaht good ol' London? Why—if yer'd all packed it up—ol' Winston 'ad only to come down the Mile End Road an' give the word—an' we'd ha' fought 'em wiv bleedin' bottles. Pack up! 'Oo the 'ell ever talked o' packing it up at any time—

DONNINGTON: Nobody did. And the sergeant knows it. He's only arguing. All right. We had to fight. So what?

JOSEPH: Well, if we had to fight, somebody had to leave home, go out, and do the fighting. But it needn't have been us. We're the fools, the mugs. The smart boys—we'll say—are all still at home. Georgie here might have been still on his farm, Shaw in a factory, Corporal Donnington might have been at the Ministry of Information—

ELVIN: Cripes! Excuse me glove, Corporal!

JOSEPH: And then you wouldn't have been fools out here, would you? You'd have been all right. Not a bad war at all. Go on, just imagine yourselves doing it—with all the rest of the chaps out here, of course. Sitting at home, listening to the wireless at night. Fine, eh?

ELVIN (*slowly*): I dunno, Sar'n't—it doesn't sound so 'ot ter me. Of course if yer could get yer ticket good an' proper—that 'ud be diff'rent—

WICK: No, I don't think I'd like that, Sergeant. Not with all the other chaps away. It isn't the same at home.

JOSEPH: Phil?

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DONNINGTON: Oh—I get the idea. The argument's plain enough. It would have been worse still if we'd packed up and refused to fight. All right. But we wouldn't have been happy if we'd stayed at home and let other fellows do the fighting for us. Therefore, we're not fools to be here.

JOSEPH: Right. And what's your answer to that?

DONNINGTON (*with growing emphasis*): My answer is—we're all fools—fools or crooks. What sort of a world is it that offers a man these alternatives? Either fight or be whipped. Either sit on the desert or stay at home eating your damned heart out. Either behave like a fool or behave like a crook. What a choice! What a world!

HUGHES: Now you are talking, Corporal Donnington. I agree with you.

JOSEPH: Go on, Phil.

DONNINGTON: What's the use? You must see it for yourself. This isn't a life, this isn't a civilisation—it's nothing but a hell on earth. Women and young children trapped and screaming in blazing ruins. Chaps going mad in open boats. Whole cities burning. Millions and millions of young men throwing hot lead at each other, high in the air or down in holes in the ground. Whole countries dying of starvation. Hundreds of thousands of factories turning out nothing but planes and tanks and guns, when people want food and clothes and houses. No people getting on with their real lives. Nothing but war, war, war—torture, starvation and mass murder. And what the hell's the use of arguing about who started it? The point is—it shouldn't have been there to start. Fools! I tell you, we're all bloody madmen, the whole stinking human race.

ELVIN: Gahr-lumme, yer've said something this time, Corp.

HUGHES: He's right—quite right indeed, I tell you. My uncle says the very same thing. We are all mad, he says. In the chapel he says it too—for my uncle is a very fine preacher too.

SHAW: Corporal's not doing too bad at it either.

JOSEPH (*quietly*): That all, Phil?

DONNINGTON: No, it isn't, and I might as well finish now that I've got going. We've made it a hell on earth, and for all I can see, it's going to stay like that. We're all fighting for a better world, are we? Yes, they're all telling us that now. I've heard 'em. And they make me laugh. They make me laugh because I don't want to cry, that's all. Better world my foot! Who's telling us we're fighting for a better world? All the old crocks who helped to get us into this mess, and who go round telling the people how brave they are, instead of getting down on their knees and asking to be forgiven because they got 'em

ACT I

DESERT HIGHWAY

into this bloody mess. We had one great war, which knocked off about ten million men. Did anybody learn anything? Not one God-damned thing, except how to make faster planes, bigger bombs and heavier tanks. And now we're in another war, worse still. And is anybody learning anything? Not a thing. You listen to 'em. You read what they say. For all I can see, in another twenty years, we'll all be at it again, worse than ever. Listen—and don't try to be funny because I can't take it just now. I quarrelled with a girl once—the only one I ever really cared about—just because she wouldn't give me a child. Well, now I know she was right. I wouldn't bring a deaf-blind monkey into such a world. Let it rot.

He walks away, to hide his feelings. The others are silent, watching him go.

JOSEPH (*quietly*): Phil?

DONNINGTON (*over his shoulder*): Okay, Ben. I'm all right.

Goes out right.

WICK (*after a pause*): I didn't understand all that.

ELVIN: That's 'cos yer too young, Georgie. What did you make o' that little packet, Sar'n't?

JOSEPH: Doesn't make much odds what I thought of it, Knocker. You see, I'm different from the rest of you.

ELVIN: What—'cos yer got three stripes?

JOSEPH: No, of course not. But, you see, I'm a Jew.

HUGHES: Why should that make any difference?

JOSEPH: We've a history that goes back a long way. And a lot has happened to us. Mostly unpleasant. What's happening now has happened before to us—this is the worst because it's the most thorough and ruthless—but we've had it before. That makes the difference.

SHAW: Ah dare say—but ah don't quite see what you're getting at, Sergeant.

HUGHES: I don't either.

JOSEPH: If there's time to explain later on, I will. And it's just possible we might have a lot of time on our hands just now. (*Calling.*) Phil?

DONNINGTON (*off, from tank*): Yes?

JOSEPH (*calling*): Try the wireless again.

DONNINGTON (*off, calling*): I am doing. But I can't get anything.

JOSEPH (*calling*): Keep on with it. (*To the others.*) Get cleaned up here, boys. And don't be too long about it, because it'll be dark fairly soon—and I want you two, Shaw and Hughes, to see to the guns and

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check the ammo—and you two, Elvin and Wick, check the rations and water. There is water over there, isn't there, Knocker?

ELVIN: 'At's ri', Sar'n't, I 'ad a dekko at it when we first come. Not so ruddy much, there isn't, an' what there is there's dark an' crawlin'—looks more like maggots potted meat.

JOSEPH: We can chlorinate it and boil it.

ELVIN: Yer could make bleedin' rissoles out of it.

JOSEPH: Bring some in when you've cleared up. I'm going to see if we can't get some sense out of that wireless set. And all you four, keep a sharp look-out for planes. It's not too late yet for one to be passing—either one of ours or one of theirs.

Goes off, as if into tank. ELVIN and WICK clear up, with some perfunctory assistance from SHAW and HUGHES.

SHAW: Water. Yer never think about water till yer in one o' these God-forsaken 'oles. At 'ome yer just turn tap on an' there it is—much as yer want.

ELVIN: Yus, an' what's better still, Yorky—yer can step out to the nearest boozer—an' say "Pint o' bitter"—an' she pulls the ol' 'andle—an' there y'are. An' I'll bet there's some blokes grumblin' 'cos the price 'as gone up or there's a fly in it—strewth!

WICK: First time I went home on leave our farm was nearly flooded out. It was just after there'd been a lot of snow and then it had all melted, and all the low fields and the bottom of the road were under water. I come home that time late at night and there was a bright moon, and all the water was glittering—it looked fine.

ELVIN: There oughter bin some rockets an' a band playin'.

HUGHES: A mile up the hill from where I live, in the woods, there's a wonderful waterfall. Everybody comes to see it. You hear it roaring long before you see it, and in the spring the woods are full of bluebells—sometimes we took our suppers up there, and then come back through the woods, singing all together. . . . When you come to stay with us, Georgie, after the war, we will go an' see the waterfall.

ELVIN: Nah, wait a minute, Taff. First thing Georgie does when they let 'im off the farm is to come an' see me an' the ol' trouble-an'-strife an' a few o' my ol' Chinas—proper ruddy characters—that 'e's already 'eard tell of from me—see? 'At's right, isn't it, Georgie?

WICK: Well—

He stops short, and looks so serious that the others stare at him.

ELVIN: Wazzamatta, Georgie boy?

WICK (*deeply disturbed*): I don't know.

He shakes his head, then turns away.

ACT I

DESERT HIGHWAY

ELVIN (*with gruff concern*): Take it easy, China, take it easy. 'At's a boy. Time you get back 'ome, your ol' man an' your brother'll 'ave piled so much nicker out of that farm, all you'll 'ave to do is to bite the end off yer cigars an' strike matches—when me an' Yorky an' Taff is wonderin' 'ow to scrape a few bobs together.

SHAW: An' ah'll bet that's right an' all.

WICK (*gravely*): I'll fetch that water, shall I?

ELVIN (*cheerfully*): That's right. Feel better when you come back, you'll see. Only keep yer 'and out o' that water. It might bite yer.

WICK goes to get a container for the water, and then we see him go off slowly with it left. The others watch him go, exchanging significant glances.

SHAW (*quietly*): What's up with 'im?

ELVIN: I dunno. But don't get it inter yer 'ead the poor little bleeder's windy—'cos 'e isn't.

HUGHES: He did it once before when we were talking about after the war.

SHAW: Did what?

HUGHES: He stopped suddenly—and wouldn't say any more—and then he walked away—shaking his head.

ELVIN: 'At's why I let 'im go for the water—see? Gives 'im something to do by 'imself—so's 'e can say "'Ere I am, mother—in the bleedin' desert—all oky-doky" or—or whatever 'e wants to say to 'er. 'E's a good boy to 'is mother, young Georgie is. Not like me. I was a proper bastard to my ol' woman—till I come 'ome on leaf—last war it was—wiv my mind made up to give the ol' girl a good time—an' then I was too late—they'd just taken 'er into the East London Hospital—

SHAW (*who is looking intently across left*): Hey! Knocker!

ELVIN: Wazzamatter?

SHAW: Plane.

All three turn and stare at the sky out left. We cannot hear anything yet, but they can.

HUGHES: I can't see it, but I can hear it.

SHAW: It's comin' this way an' all. (*Turning to call.*) Sergeant, Sergeant. Plane!

ELVIN (*going to left to shout*): Hey, Georgie. Plane. Plane.

JOSEPH and DONNINGTON come hurrying out of the tank. They carry field-glasses, and at once look in the direction indicated by the others. We can now hear the plane distantly, but steadily approaching.

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DONNINGTON: One of ours, I think.

HUGHES: Must be.

JOSEPH: Wait a minute. I don't recognise this one. May be one of the new American—no, it's one of theirs—take cover.

ELVIN: Hey, Georgie. Down, boy, down.

JOSEPH: Come on—take cover.

They hurry off, and now we hear the plane coming fast and low. A burst of machine-gun fire off left and then, with the plane immediately above, another burst of machine-gun fire aimed at the tank, etc. If possible, all lights should be quickly dipped to suggest the shadow of the plane passing quickly over the scene. The whole incident should be staged as realistically and dramatically as possible. We hear the plane going away. JOSEPH comes out, standing as high as possible, watching the plane go, through his glasses. The others emerge, rather cautiously, with the rather forced jocularly of men coming out of a crisis.

ELVIN: Well, that bleeder took a nice crack at us all right, all right.

JOSEPH (*still looking*): He's not turning. Wants to get back. Lucky for us it'll be dark soon.

SHAW: If ah'd 'ad gun out, ah'd 'ave leathered yon chap. Ah put a burst right into one, time we wor near t'Canal. Saucy mucker!

ELVIN: 'Ow's young Georgie doin', Sar'n't? Did 'e get down all right—same as I told 'im?

JOSEPH: Yes, he's down. Taking his time about getting up too. Thinks he might be coming back at him. Better tell him it's all right now. Here! (*Breaks off, and looks harder.*) He's been hit. Get the First-Aid box. Hughes, you come with me. Knocker, get some water going. You other two, stay here—put some blankets in the tent. Come on, Hughes.

He and HUGHES race off left.

ELVIN (*dazed for a moment*): Georgie! Christ!

DONNINGTON (*quietly*): Get going, Knocker. You can curse it all afterwards.

SHAW (*getting blanket*): It may be nowt after all. Ah've seen chaps knocked flat an' it's turned out to be nowt but a scratch.

ELVIN has gone out right. The other two take blankets into tent, and generally tidy up—talking as they move about.

DONNINGTON (*slowly*): I hope the kid's all right. But I have a feeling he isn't.

SHAW: Seems to me, Corporal, you've got some fairly 'orrible sorts o' thoughts an' feelings in that 'ead o' yours, if what you give us in that

speech o' yours was a fair sample. An' ah'm not so sure you're not right an' all. It's a mad monkey-'ouse we're in, all right.

DONNINGTON: You've noticed it too, have you?

SHAW: Course ah 'ave. Couple o' chaps come in a plane—they don't know us an' we don't know them—an' they're miles from 'ome an' so are we—they pump some lead out—an' dahn goes poor little George Wick. Seems to me if chaps at top can't arrange it better nor this, it 'ud be cheaper to shoot them instead o' shooting each other.

DONNINGTON: Wouldn't make any difference. It isn't just the chaps at the top—as you call them. What's wrong goes all through. Nobody learns anything, and nobody wants to. We're all barmy somewhere inside. The Nazis and Fascists and Japs are worse than we are, but we're barmy too.

SHAW: Well, ah don't know. Ah don't feel barmy. (ELVIN *comes in*. SHAW *returns*.) Corporal says we're all barmy.

ELVIN: I've 'eard 'im before. (*Looking out left*.) Can't see 'em coming.

DONNINGTON (*looking through his glasses*): They're putting a dressing on him.

ELVIN: I got the water goin'. Can't do no more 'ere. Might as well go an' give 'em a 'and wiv 'im, eh, Corp?

DONNINGTON: All right, Knocker.

ELVIN *hurries out left*.

SHAW: Yer'd think to 'ear Knocker talk, 'e'd no more 'eart in 'im than that there stone, but ah tell yer—he's right fond o' young Georgie, is Knocker. Do owt for 'im.

DONNINGTON (*after a pause*): What do you call those two girls of yours in Ossett?

SHAW: One's Nelly—and t'other's Olive.

DONNINGTON: Nelly and Olive. And I'll bet they're both going out with chaps to-night.

SHAW (*heartily*): An' ah'll bet they are an' all. Me sister told me as much t'last letter she wrote. They've got t'Air Force round there, so they're off out wi' t'Air Force.

DONNINGTON: And don't you care?

SHAW: Well, ah'd sooner think o' summat else than what's going on there—but ah can't grumble, can ah? ah mean to say—if ah can't make me mind whether it's Nelly ah want or Olive, ah can't blame 'em if they go aht wi' t'Air Force. Not that they mightn't do that onny way. An ah must say if a nice-lookin' Waaf come along to-night, ah might ha' one or two ideas o' me own.

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DONNINGTON (*with mock gravity*): Yes, you might. But I have a feeling that a nice-looking Waaf—or a nice-looking anybody else—won't come along to-night. (*Quotes with slight over-emphasis.*)

“White in the moon the long road lies,
The moon stands blank above;
White in the moon the long road lies
That leads me from my love.

Still hangs the hedge without a gust,
Still, still the shadows stay;
My feet upon the moonlit dust
Pursue the ceaseless way . . .”

SHAW: That's poetry, in' it?

DONNINGTON: That's poetry.

SHAW: We 'ad poetry at school but I thought nowt on it then an' ah've never bothered with it since. But that's all right, what you said. You mun gi' me that bit again sometime, Corporal. (*Repeats carefully.*) White in t'moon—t'long road lies—at leads me from me love. Ah see what t'chap's gettin' at there.

The light is now going.

DONNINGTON: They'd better hurry up. It'll be dark soon.

SHAW: Ay, it's light one minute 'ere an' dark next. Ah reckon nowt o' that. Ah like it gradual same as it is at 'ome.

DONNINGTON: They're bringing him back. Nothing more we can do here, is there?

SHAW (*staring about him*): Nowt as I can see. 'Ere, Corporal, ah wonder what this 'ere stone is.

*Indicates the top of stone monument prominent in background.
Both men look at it.*

DONNINGTON: Probably some old stone monument—or what's left of it—buried deep in the sand. I believe this is an old desert road. Thousands of years ago men were travelling this way, and probably some of them often spent the night in this very place. I don't suppose they were very different from what we are. They were on the road too, far from home, wondering what was happening back there, wondering what it's all about, laughing and cursing and crying out and dying.

SHAW: Ay, 'appen this stone could tell a lot if it could talk.

DONNINGTON: Yes. But could it tell us what we want to know? Could it tell us why we hurt each other and hurt ourselves and why there's something inside us that cries out in rage and shame at this misery and then dies before we do?

SHAW: Nah, steady on, Corporal. Things is bad enough without talkin' so peculiar. You give me the bloody creeps once already. 'Ere they are.

They go forward a few steps. JOSEPH, HUGHES and ELVIN enter slowly left, carrying WICK, who is obviously very badly wounded.

JOSEPH (*quietly*): Straight into the tent with him. You stay with him first, Hughes, then we'll relieve you. Now steady—take it easy.

DONNINGTON (*quietly*): How is he, Ben?

JOSEPH: Pretty bad. Had to give him morphia.

They carry WICK into the tent, and after a moment JOSEPH and ELVIN come out, leaving HUGHES.

ELVIN (*to HUGHES inside tent*): I'll get a bit o' shut-eye now, Taff, then yer can wake me up soon as you like—an' I'll watch 'im.

JOSEPH: All right, Knocker, you get some sleep now. You'd better get down too, Shaw.

SHAW: All right, Sergeant.

JOSEPH: I'm going to have another go at that wireless, Phil. It wasn't so good before—with nobody knowing where we are—but now that plane has spotted us, and with young Wick on our hands, we've got to send a message somehow.

DONNINGTON: Well, I'm no radio expert, but there's one little dodge they showed us on that course that I'd like to try. (*As they move.*) How is the kid?

JOSEPH (*moving*): Too bad to last long out here.

They go out to tank. SHAW and ELVIN have got their blankets and are now preparing to sleep. The light has almost gone. They talk very quietly as they get down.

SHAW: 'Eard what the sergeant said about young Georgie?

ELVIN: I 'eard. But I needn't tell 'im ter tell me. I've seen too many blokes knocked aht not ter know that poor kid's bleedin' bad.

SHAW: That's right.

ELVIN: 'E didn't know 'em when they got to 'im. Cryin' out an' talkin' to 'is mother an' brother, 'e was. I call it a perishin' ruddy shame. It's always them good kids that gets it.

SHAW (*drowsily*): Ay—remember young Kitchen—an' that young Durham lad who played the mouth organ——

ELVIN (*drowsily*): I can remember 'undreds of 'em—this war—last war—India an' Palestine too—'undreds of 'em—'undreds of 'em——

SHAW (*after pause, drowsily*): Corporal says chaps 'as been travelling this way for thousands of years—thousands of years, 'e says——

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ELVIN (*almost asleep*): 'Undreds of 'em—yers—'undreds of 'em——

SHAW (*almost asleep*): Thousands o' years—this same desert—thousands o' years——

They are now asleep. The stage is almost dark. A spotlight, like a shaft of moonlight, comes on to the stone monument, as the curtain slowly falls.

END OF ACT ONE

INTERLUDE

The scene is the same, but now it is 703 B.C. Where the tank was, right, is now a rough stone building, without door or window visible. There is still a tent at left but it is a different tent—a rough black tent. There are various bundles, to suggest this is a caravan on the move. The characters are more or less the same, but of course their accents are less marked. ELVIN, SHAW, HUGHES, WICK are of indeterminate Near Eastern nationality—or of various nationalities but more or less alike because their trade, as caravanners, has made them alike. The three older men wear beards, only WICK is smooth-faced. They wear dusty rough patched clothes. DONNINGTON is different, for he is now an Egyptian scribe—smooth, clean-shaven, neat, dressed in a white linen tunic or something of the kind. JOSEPH is a shepherd from Judah and is bearded—dark and roughly dressed. The idol is shown exactly as at end of Act I with HUGHES in the same position—alone on the stage. Full daylight with strong sunlight. HUGHES remains prostrated before the idol, motionless for several moments, and then ELVIN enters right, from behind the building, where all right entrances are made throughout.

ELVIN (giving HUGHES a kick): Get up.

HUGHES (angrily): Fool! (But he scrambles to his feet.) You may have angered the god.

ELVIN (contemptuously): God! That's no god. You'll pray and sacrifice to anything. I told the overseer at Damascus that most of our trouble came from you, and that it was the last caravan I'd take with you——

HUGHES: That *you'd* take! Who made you the leader? I'm as good as you.

ELVIN: Oh no, you're not. I was travelling the desert when your mother was still wiping you—if she ever did wipe you.

HUGHES: We four are equal—two for the camels, two for the asses—and only the Egyptian is above us.

ELVIN: And who is it that the Egyptian asks for advice about the weather and the roads? He comes to me. He's promised me a job—if I want it—when we reach Memphis.

HUGHES: We shall never reach Memphis—you'll see.

ELVIN: Oh—stop croaking!

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HUGHES: Besides, the Egyptians are all liars.

ELVIN: Oh—yes, the Egyptians are all liars. And why? Because you once lost a piece of silver to two black sorcerers at Tanis. You'd make anybody into a liar, you would, just because you'll believe anything. Praying to that! (*Points to idol.*) Who is he, anyway?

HUGHES: He may be the little god of this part of the desert.

ELVIN: I don't give a fig for him. He's nobody. Hasn't even a name. If you'd had any sense, when we were up North, you'd have offered something to that old Hittite god—Teshub—old Teshub riding on his bull—lord of the weather. Only time I gave him a miss, we lost half a caravan between here and Damascus. Remember that time, up North, when we looked into the gardens—and all the women were doing their annual weep—tearing their hair, shrieking and wailing, cutting themselves with sharp knives—while the fat eunuchs of Ashtoreth went walking round and round—?

HUGHES: One of them saw us and cursed us. And then we lost five camels.

ELVIN: We'd have lost 'em anyhow.

Enter SHAW and WICK from right.

SHAW: The Egyptian is still talking to the captain of the soldiers.

WICK: And the soldiers are preparing to go.

ELVIN: Are they coming our way?

SHAW: I don't know. The Egyptian told us to wait.

WICK: I want to get away from here. Why can't we go?

SHAW: Take it easy. I keep telling him he'll never do for caravan work unless he can take it easy.

ELVIN: That's right, young one. Said the same to you myself.

WICK: It was my father's idea that I should make this journey. I wanted to be a metal worker, like my uncle.

ELVIN: And stick in one place all your life?

WICK: Why not?

SHAW: Well, you stay in a city, you build up a business, and then what—there's an invasion, the city's sacked, and either you're slit up or dragged off into slavery. I lost two brothers that way.

HUGHES: And I lost my father and mother—and three of my father's brothers—and my sister was taken to Nineveh—

ELVIN: So that's who you were looking for, that time we went to Nineveh—your sister, eh?

HUGHES: Yes, I went looking for my sister.

SHAW: Well, that wasn't your sister I saw you with.

WICK: I wish we'd been going to Nineveh. I should like to see it once.

HUGHES: Beats them all, in my opinion, just as a place to see. You never saw such temples, parks and gardens. Wonderful. You could sit under the almond blossom and smell the lilies, and watch the lions—hundreds and hundreds of lions they have there. (*To ELVIN.*) Haven't they?

ELVIN: Yes, but I liked the women—never mind the lions. All the people in the world are there at Nineveh. Every colour, shape and size. Streets crowded, inns packed out. Costs you plenty, too—but it's fun while it lasts. Mind you, I wouldn't live there—no fear.

WICK: Why?

ELVIN: You've got to be too careful. Do anything wrong—say a word too many—and they're on to you. They're cruel hard devils, the Assyrians. No, if I'm going to leave the road and stay anywhere, give me Egypt.

HUGHES (*jeeringly*): He thinks the Egyptians will offer him a job at Memphis.

ELVIN (*truculently*): Well, why not? Listen, there are chaps no better than me that have gone a long way in Egypt. And living's cheap, and you can get plenty of good beer. You're safe too in Egypt—you can risk raising a family—not like up here and along the coast, where before you know where you are—the town's burning, the invaders are in, and you're running for your life.

SHAW: Yes, that's what it's like up here, but, if you ask me, it's the same everywhere else now—Egypt or anywhere. Nobody's safe any more. You heard what that old man said who came out of the cave back there—when was it, day before yesterday. He said the gods were angry and so the world was coming to an end.

WICK: But he was mad. I heard him say that he had heard the sheep and the birds talking about it amongst themselves.

HUGHES: Well, why shouldn't he? What about that lamb that spoke and prophesied—

ELVIN: Just a minute. You didn't hear it, did you?

HUGHES: No, I didn't, but lots of people did.

ELVIN: It's a funny thing but I'm never there when these things happen. When I'm about, the only talking that lambs and sheep do is just *Baa*.

HUGHES: Because you can't be there doesn't prove—

ELVIN (*turning as he goes*): And that's what I say to you.

HUGHES: What?

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ELVIN: Baa!

Goes out right.

WICK: Which way will we go from here?

SHAW: Down through Samaria and Judæa. We'll have to have an Israelite guide.

WICK: What's Samaria like?

SHAW: Nothing much now. They say it used to be very rich—but that's before my time.

HUGHES: The first time I ever came this way, I was only a kid, and just when we got to Samaria, the Assyrians burst everything wide open, and then let hell loose. They were rounding up the Samaritans and driving 'em off like cattle. Kids being dragged out of their mother's arms to be thrown to Moloch. Yes, and some of the fathers were offering their kids to Moloch themselves—feeding the furnaces with 'em.

WICK (*cautiously, dropping his voice*): My uncle hates Moloch.

HUGHES (*alarmed*): You be careful what you're saying.

WICK: All right. I'm only telling you two.

SHAW: Yes, but he's right, though. Keep it to yourself.

WICK (*almost in a whisper*): The Egyptian doesn't believe in Moloch.

HUGHES: He's got plenty of gods and goddesses of his own. You'll see. Bulls and snakes and cats. There's one with the head of a bird——

SHAW: There's two or three. And there's one with the head of a crocodile—Sebek. And in one of their lakes there's a big crocodile that is fed every day by the priests with meat and the finest meal.

HUGHES: But you never know what you're seeing down there in Egypt, there's so much sorcery. In all the towns there are hundreds of sorcerers and soothsayers, and they come up and stare at you—and begin telling your past and your future. There was an old blind sorcerer with a basket full of live snakes who came up to me once at Sais——

He breaks off abruptly because at this moment DONNINGTON, as the Egyptian, enters from right.

DONNINGTON (*who speaks with calm authority*): Has the guide arrived?

HUGHES: No, not yet. Is he coming here?

DONNINGTON: That is what was arranged.

SHAW: Who is he?

DONNINGTON: I don't know. Probably some Israelite shepherd, who knows all the mountain passes. If he does not come soon, we must go forward without him.

SHAW: Why? You said last night there was no hurry.

DONNINGTON: Now I know more than I knew last night. I know we cannot afford to linger here.

SHAW: The soldiers have told you something.

DONNINGTON (*calmly*): Yes, the soldiers have told me something.

HUGHES (*after a pause, uneasily*): Well—what did they tell you?

DONNINGTON: This morning, some of their horsemen, who were scouting in the North-East, came riding back at full speed to report that they had seen a vast moving cloud of dust, as if the very hills were shaking themselves——

HUGHES (*alarmed*): The Assyrians.

DONNINGTON: Yes, a large Assyrian army. It should pass well to the North of us, moving towards Phœnicia. But some of their horsemen might discover us here——

SHAW: That's why the soldiers are getting ready to go.

DONNINGTON: Yes. Otherwise their line of retreat may soon be cut off. They will be gone within an hour. And we should be going too, soon, for although the Assyrians may be old friends of yours, they are not friends of mine—or of Egypt.

SHAW: Don't worry. We don't like 'em any more than you do. But we've only these bits of things to pack up and then we can go, and once we're on the move south, they're not likely to find us.

DONNINGTON: Very well. We will wait a little longer for the guide. It may save time in the end, for we could easily miss him, I imagine, once we have moved off, for he might be coming to us another way.

HUGHES: Yes, we had better wait. (*More humbly.*) Tell me, Master, for you are a learned scribe, what is the little god there?

He points to the idol.

DONNINGTON (*glancing at it and shrugging*): A piece of rough carved stone, my friend. No god at all. A barbarian image. But I think I have seen you praying to it once or twice.

HUGHES: Well, what if you have? I don't like taking any chances, these days. He—it—might have power in these parts.

DONNINGTON: Pray to it if it pleases you. But don't ask me to join you.

WICK (*timidly*): Haven't you such gods and images in Egypt, sir?

DONNINGTON (*smiling*): We have everything in Egypt. We have

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learning and knowledge, and we have ignorance. We have great families who have given us governors and high priests and exquisite princesses from time immemorial. We have scribes and architects and craftsmen. We have humble peasants. We have slaves of every colour—and black savages from the mountains and forests beyond Ethiopia. We have a civilisation that has endured for thousands of years, and that will endure for ever.

WICK: Greater than Assyria.

DONNINGTON (*contemptuously*): You talk like a child. Yesterday, Assyria did not exist, and to-morrow it will not exist. It is a thing of to-day. Before Assyria was heard of, Babylon was great, and may be great again—for Babylon was a civilisation of a kind and not a mere plundering military machine—but long before Babylon was built, Egypt was a whole world in itself, and had raised the great pyramids and carved the everlasting Sphinx. I had an old master who worshipped Thoth the moon-god, and by fasting could put himself into a trance, free himself from time, and so gaze into the far future. He told me something of these visions—only a little, for I was very young and not fit for such knowledge—and he said he had seen strange and incomprehensible things—horseless chariots that went as fast as the wind—men inside great metal birds—men making wars—for always there were wars, as to-day—with thunder and lightning and vast invisible javelins—but even so, Egypt was still there—and the great pyramids still cast their mighty shadows—and the noble Sphinx still gazed across the desert. That—is Egypt.

There is a moment's silence. Then ELVIN comes bustling in, looking excited.

ELVIN: Have you told them?

DONNINGTON: No, I was waiting for you to join us.

ELVIN (*who cannot keep it to himself*): One of us has got to go with 'em.

HUGHES: With the soldiers?

ELVIN: Yes, and they're packing up now.

SHAW: Why should one of us go with 'em. They know the way they want to go better than any of us would.

ELVIN: Don't ask me, ask him.

They look uneasily at DONNINGTON, who adopts a smooth but rather evasive manner.

DONNINGTON: I was about to tell you. But I cannot give you the reason. I can only tell you that their captain insisted. Perhaps he is not sure of the roads and needs a guide. He wanted to take you all, but I pointed out that I had his commander's promise that this caravan

should go safely south, and he knew that I had a mission to fulfil in Jerusalem—some gifts for King Hezekiah—before going on to Egypt. All that was settled with the Aramæans, who are now the allies of Egypt. So the captain agreed only to take one of you. But one of you will have to go with him, he declared, or he would take you all.

HUGHES (*uneasily*): Which one?

DONNINGTON: He did not care which one went. And neither do I, for I shall be certain of having at least two experienced men left with me.

SHAW: You'd be certain of three—if he—(*pointing to Wick*)—went back with the soldiers.

WICK (*in alarm*): I don't want to go with him. Why should I? Just because I'm the youngest. That's not fair. You don't know what's going to happen to those chaps or what they're up to. I'm not going back with them.

SHAW: And if you won't, why should one of us?

ELVIN: Well, we'll have to draw lots, that's all.

HUGHES: Now wait a minute, every time I've ever drawn lots with you, I've been unlucky.

SHAW: And so have I.

ELVIN: Listen to 'em. I can't help it if I'm lucky, can I? You ought to have bought one of them lucky charms, same as I did, that time in Tyre. Best lucky charm I ever had and I've still got it. So look out.

SHAW (*to DONNINGTON*): You shall arrange the drawing of the lots.

DONNINGTON: Very well.

ELVIN: Four pieces of stick will do, one shorter than the other three. I'll get 'em for you.

HUGHES (*alarmed*): Oh—no, you won't.

DONNINGTON: There is no need. I have some. I will get them.

He goes out right. The others glance at each other uneasily. Then ELVIN takes out a charm attached to a cord or chain round his neck, holds it up and strokes and kisses it. SHAW watches stolidly. WICK, after glancing at the others, then sits still and his mouth moves, as if he were silently praying. Meanwhile, HUGHES has been attracted to the idol again, has gone nearer to it, and finally drops down on his knees before it, bowing and supplicating.

JOSEPH (*off, but approaching, loudly*): Why do you bow down to wood and stone?

All four look round, startled. JOSEPH now enters from left. HUGHES scrambles to his feet.

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HUGHES: What's that to do with you?

JOSEPH: I hate to see a man wasting his time and energy. What's the use of asking that lump of stone for anything? It can't hear. It can't see. It doesn't know you're there.

SHAW: Are you an Israelite?

JOSEPH: Of the tribe of Judah.

ELVIN: You must be the guide we've been waiting for.

JOSEPH: Not unless you have with you a certain Egyptian scribe.

ELVIN: He's back there. Be here in a minute. We four have to draw lots, because one of us must go off with the Aramæan soldiers, damn their eyes!

JOSEPH: Why are they in such a hurry to go, these Aramæans?

ELVIN: There's a big Assyrian army coming from the North-East. If you know the Assyrians——

JOSEPH: I do. It's as if lions came swarming as thick as locusts, except that they are crueller than lions. But this must be the Egyptian.

Enter DONNINGTON from right. He is carrying four short ivory sticks. He acknowledges the salutation of JOSEPH with gracious politeness.

DONNINGTON: You are the guide sent by Shemer to lead us down to Jerusalem?

JOSEPH: I am.

DONNINGTON: You know the passes between Samaria into Judæa.

JOSEPH: Yes. I am of Judah myself, but I know also all the country of Ephraim, all the last kingdom of the ten northern tribes.

HUGHES: I've been telling them how I went through there—as a child—when the Assyrians put paid to that lot——

JOSEPH (*sternly*): The word of the prophet was fulfilled.

DONNINGTON: What prophet was that? You Israelites have so many prophets.

JOSEPH: The prophet Amos, who was, as I am, a simple herdsman, before Jehovah spoke in his voice. He came suddenly to the great festival at Bethel, where the nobles and the rich men and their painted women and the false priests were drinking wine and sacrificing to the Bull and dancing before the image of Ashtoreth; and he cried to them:

“The Lord will roar from Zion,
And utter his voice from Jerusalem;
And the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn;
And the top of Carmel shall wither . . .”

And again he cried to them:

“Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan,
That are in the mountains of Samaria,
Which oppress the poor, which crush the needy,
Which say to their masters ‘Bring and let us drink’
The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness,
That lo, the days shall come upon you,
That he will take you away with hooks,
And your posterity with fishhooks . . .”

WICK (*astonished and impressed*): Who is this Lord God?

JOSEPH: I will answer you in the words of that same prophet Amos:

“. . . Ye who turn judgment to wormwood,
And leave off righteousness in the earth,
Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion,
And turneth the shadow of death into the morning,
And maketh the day dark with night:
That calleth for the waters of the sea
And poureth them out upon the face of the earth;
The Lord is his name.”

He stands silent for a moment, while the others stare at him wonderingly, then he turns away and sits down.

DONNINGTON (*after a pause, holding up the sticks*): Here are the four sticks. One is shorter than the other three. He who draws the short stick must go with the soldiers. You are agreed?

ELVIN: All right to me.

SHAW: And me. I'll take my chance.

HUGHES (*hesitating*): So will I—so long as there's no trickery.

DONNINGTON (*to Wick*): And you?

WICK (*doubting, fearful*): Yes—I suppose so—but——

ELVIN: But what?

WICK (*ashamed*): I am afraid. I don't want to go with them.

JOSEPH (*turning to look at them*): If this youth is afraid—and I can see he is—why don't you three, who are older, draw lots and so leave him with us?

DONNINGTON (*smoothly*): No, that wouldn't do. He must take his chance with the others. Now see—(*he shows them the ends of the four sticks, hiding their length*)—you have only to take one of these——

HUGHES (*worried*): No Egyptian conjuring and trickery, mind.

SHAW: Let the Israelite hold the sticks then.

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JOSEPH: No. I'll have nothing to do with this. One of the older men should go.

ELVIN: You mind your own business.

JOSEPH (*sternly*): There is something evil here.

DONNINGTON: We are merely settling something among ourselves that does not concern you, my friend. It was already arranged before you arrived. You were not sent to us to be our guide on all matters, but only to lead us through your barbaric mountain passes. Keep your mind on your own affairs. Work out the quickest route from here as far as Jerusalem.

JOSEPH: I smell death.

ELVIN: Oh—give it a rest—you're worse than he is. (*Indicating HUGHES.*)

DONNINGTON: We waste time. Now choose.

He holds out the sticks as before.

ELVIN: All right. Now's your chance again, my old lucky charm.

He touches his charm, and then goes forward and takes a stick.

SHAW (*going forward*): Here, let's have a look.

He goes forward, and after staring hard at the stick, he chooses one.

HUGHES (*in sudden alarm*): Only two left!

DONNINGTON (*amused*): Yes, but they may be two long ones. The chance is the same.

HUGHES (*looking at the sticks*): Wait a minute now! That one.

He takes one. DONNINGTON now holds up the last one to WICK who comes forward shakily and takes it. It is the short one, though this is not obvious at first.

DONNINGTON: Now show me. (*They show him the sticks in their hands. He points to WICK, who gives a smothered cry.*) Fortune was against you.

ELVIN: Sorry about that, boy. Never mind. Won't be too bad.

HUGHES: No, of course not. For a youngster like yourself, there's nothing like going off with a troop of soldiers.

WICK (*slowly, carefully*): You needn't say any more. I'm not afraid now. Somehow, it's different now.

ELVIN: That's right. Took it too seriously, before.

WICK: No. It is now that I know how serious it is. But I'm not afraid. (*He looks across at JOSEPH, who is now regarding him gravely.*) You were right.

DESERT HIGHWAY

DONNINGTON: I am sorry but you will have to hurry. Get your things.

ELVIN: Oh—we'll get his things. And see him off.

SHAW: Come on, boy.

He takes up one of the bundles and ELVIN takes another, and with HUGHES they go off right. Meanwhile, WICK and JOSEPH have come closer together and are regarding each other gravely.

JOSEPH: There is something you wish me to do—or to say—what is it?

WICK (*hesitatingly*): This Jehovah—this Lord God—of yours——

JOSEPH: Yes?

WICK: Is he a sun god?

JOSEPH: He is the maker of suns. And moons and stars.

WICK: What is his image like?

JOSEPH: He has no image. We of the tribe of Judah who keep the word do not worship images. It was the worship of images that brought ruin upon the ten tribes.

DONNINGTON: There's no time now for Hebrew history. This youth must go.

WICK (*rather desperately*): Where is he—this Lord God?

JOSEPH: He is on high.

WICK (*distressed*): No—I do not understand. And I must go. But there was something you said about the seven stars and Orion. Say it again to me before I go, so that I may remember it.

JOSEPH (*slowly*): "Seek him that maketh the seven stars and Orion,
And turneth the shadow of death into the
morning."

DONNINGTON (*sharply*): You must go now.

WICK (*slowly*): "And turneth the shadow of death into the morning."

He smiles, nods gratefully to JOSEPH, and then hurries out right.

JOSEPH *stares after them sombrely.* DONNINGTON, *relieved, sits down and smiles.*

DONNINGTON (*after a pause*): We must be going soon. As soon as the soldiers have moved off, I will tell the men to pack up these things—for the animals are already loaded—and then we can go. Take us by the shortest route to Samaria, and then by the quickest roads through that country into Judah.

JOSEPH (*abstractedly*): Yes.

DONNINGTON: You Israelites of the old faith have some curious and fanatical notions. For instance, didn't I hear you telling that youth

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that it was the worship of images that brought ruin upon your ten Northern tribes?

JOSEPH: That is what I said. It is what our prophets have told us. There is in Jerusalem now a great prophet—Isaiah——

DONNINGTON: Yes, I have heard of Isaiah.

JOSEPH: He is old now, but he goes barefoot and almost naked, looking like a captive slave, to warn the people of Judah——

DONNINGTON: Yes, I have heard. To warn them against rebellion against Assyria, to denounce the new Egyptian alliance. And now you are going to tell me you have heard this same Isaiah declare that it was the worship of images—as you call it—that brought ruin on the ten tribes and the Northern kingdom.

JOSEPH: Yes, I have heard him tell the people that. He is a great preacher.

DONNINGTON: But don't you see the absurdity of these ideas? The Northern kingdom fell simply because it couldn't stand up against the powerful Assyrian army. Purely a military problem. Nothing to do with the worship of images at all.

JOSEPH: You did not listen to the words of the prophet Amos that I recited. He said to the greedy nobles and the false priests: "Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth——"

DONNINGTON: Very striking, no doubt. You Israelites are excellent poets. But not so effective as the striking power of the Assyrian heavy and light cavalry and their first-class archery.

JOSEPH: You are like so many. You have knowledge but no wisdom. You have clear sight but no insight. The herdman Amos could see further than you and all the priests and scribes in Egypt.

DONNINGTON (*smiling*): Now you are behaving like a barbarian. You cannot reply to my argument and so you become abusive. Turning judgment to wormwood, leaving off righteousness, worshipping images—what have they to do with the facts of the military problem?

JOSEPH (*with emphasis*): Because a kingdom in which judgment has turned to wormwood and there is no righteousness is like a fruit that has gone rotten, and will crumble at a touch. Because when the Israelite has forsaken the pure worship of the Lord God, when he bows down to images and throws his children into the furnaces of Moloch and sends his daughters to prostitute themselves for Ashtoreth, then he has allowed himself to be conquered from within before the invader has shot the first arrow. The rich will not fight because they are lost in greed, drunkenness, lechery and sloth; and the poor will not

fight because they have been oppressed and crushed, and they feel that the new masters cannot be any worse than the old. It is Baal and Moloch and Ashtoreth, the false gods and goddesses of cruelty and filth, that conquer the world; and the archers and chariots of Assyria only occupy the kingdoms already fallen and lost.

DONNINGTON: These are not the gods of Egypt, nor is Egypt among such kingdoms.

JOSEPH: The turn of Egypt will surely come. I have heard Isaiah cry out against the trust in Egypt that has taken the place of the trust in the Lord. "Woe to them," he cried, "that walk to go down into Egypt and have not asked at the mouth of the Lord God; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt. Therefore shall the strength of Pharaoh be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion."

DONNINGTON: What would your prophet have his king and people do? Obey the Assyrians?

JOSEPH: No, obey the Lord God. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved," he told them. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and ye would not."

DONNINGTON: Egypt is already very old, and time cannot touch her. We have prophets too—though they speak and act very differently from these strange wild men of yours—and sometimes they peer through the mists of the centuries—far into the future—but always they see Egypt, the great pyramids and the ever-enduring Sphinx.

JOSEPH: What they see is nothing but an enduring sepulchre. The stones will be there but the greatness and quickness of life will have gone. The glory of Egypt is fading now. The sun is setting across the Nile, the shadows gather, and the long night is coming.

DONNINGTON (*indifferently*): It may be so. But it does not matter. Our wisest men, who know the mysteries of Osiris and Isis, and have travelled in spirit with Anubis across the kingdoms of the dead, tell us that life is but a dream.

JOSEPH: That is idle talk. If it is a dream, it is a dream in which you bleed, and vomit in your sickness, and hear your children cry out in terror before they are tossed on to the spears of the invader. It is a dream in which Egypt gives place to Babylon and Babylon to Assyria, and Assyria—it may be—to the Medes and the men of the northern mountains—and after them—it may be to the brazen men—as the prophet said——

DONNINGTON (*interested*): What prophet is this—Isaiah again——?

JOSEPH: No, his disciple Micah, who had many visions on the mountain near my home—and would come down to tell us what he had

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seen. There were brazen men who came like a thunderbolt and conquered the world again—and after them many others—from the East—from the West—men of bronze—men of iron—men with ships—men with strange beasts——

DONNINGTON (*rather eagerly*): And men who fought with thunder and lightning and invisible javelins—and men who came inside great metal birds——

JOSEPH: You have heard him?

DONNINGTON: No. My old master—a priest of Thoth—once told me these things.

JOSEPH: Micah had many such visions on the mountain. Great vessels on the sea larger than the Ark built by Noah and his sons—and cities far greater than Jerusalem or Nineveh, Babylon or Memphis—with towers that reached to the sky—as high as the tower of Babel—and vast magical contrivances that would do with ease in a day the labour of ten thousand men. And yet, said Micah, these visions too were filled with fire and blood, anger and suffering, and there was still desolation in men's hearts because they worshipped false gods—yes, and judgment was still turned to wormwood, and men left off righteousness. As it is now, so it will be then. Did I not hear the prophet cry:

“They built up Zion with blood,
And Jerusalem with iniquity.
The heads thereof judge for reward,
And the priests thereof teach for hire,
And the prophets thereof divine for money:
Yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say,
‘Is not the Lord among us?
None evil can come upon us.’
Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field,
And Jerusalem shall become heaps,
And the mountain of the house of the Lord as the high places of
the forest.”

DONNINGTON (*after a pause*): I tell you, Israelite, that to me—an Egyptian and a scribe—who have seen many countries and peoples and belong to the oldest of them, whose ancestors were living in courts and temples when yours lived savagely in the desert with their animals, these are only the wild visions and crazed sayings of some barbarian half-mad with fasting and loneliness—and yet, I will confess, they move me quite strangely. It may be only the chanting fury and fire of your voice. We sing very different songs to our little harps in Egypt.

JOSEPH (*gruffly*): We have our songs. But these are the inspired words of the prophets through whom our Lord God speaks. Enough!

He turns aside and sits down.

DONNINGTON (*after a pause*): What is the matter? Have I offended you?

JOSEPH: No.

DONNINGTON: What is it then?

JOSEPH: I wish to be gone from this place.

DONNINGTON: So do I. I amst only waiting for the three men to return.

JOSEPH: There is terror in the air, and I smell death.

DONNINGTON: You could find terror in the air, and could smell death, everywhere these days. For life now is like a dark violent dream, whereas in the days of my ancestors it was like a clear tranquil dream, when a man's three score years passed like the shadow of a bird across a sunlit garden. Then a man might labour lightly all his life at one pleasant task—carving the head of a god, painting the triumphs of a Pharaoh, filling the pools and tending the flower-beds outside a temple—and watch his children, and his children's children, grow—and sleep in peace. The golden age has gone, and we have entered the age of iron.

JOSEPH: You do not need to teach a Hebrew that.

DONNINGTON: Yet we Egyptians once taught you many things, and there are still some things you might learn.

JOSEPH (*fiercely*): There is nothing—— (*He breaks off.*)

DONNINGTON (*after a pause*): Well?

JOSEPH: No. I spoke then out of pride. It is our greatest fault—this fierce and challenging pride. So I stopped my mouth. (*He rises and paces a little.*)

DONNINGTON: You should rest before the journey.

JOSEPH: I am uneasy.

DONNINGTON: Why?

JOSEPH: What will become of the youth who left us?

DONNINGTON (*rather evasively*): I don't know. The captain of the soldiers demanded that one of the men should go with them, and I had no choice but to agree.

JOSEPH: And that is all you know?

DONNINGTON: That is all.

JOSEPH: I saw the shadow of death in the face of that youth. (*Suddenly going closer and staring into DONNINGTON's face.*) And you are lying.

DONNINGTON: What?

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JOSEPH (*fiercely*): You are lying.

He looks as if he is about to strike DONNINGTON, but he checks himself. The two men stare at each other.

DONNINGTON (*slowly*): Your countryman, Shemer, swore to me by his faith in your God that he would send me a guide who would take me safely to Jerusalem—on my way to Memphis. Have you too sworn to him to do this?

JOSEPH (*regretfully*): He has my word.

DONNINGTON (*smiling*): Then you must keep it.

JOSEPH: I shall keep it.

DONNINGTON: But you sound regretful.

JOSEPH: I am. If I were free to do what I please, I would go back the way I came—alone. There is something here I do not like, and already you have lied to me. I saw the shadow of death in that boy's face.

HUGHES enters right panting, as if he had been running, and very excited.

HUGHES (*pointing back*): Master—master—they have seized the youth and bound him before their altar of the Baal—we could—do nothing——

DONNINGTON: And I can do nothing.

JOSEPH (*fiercely, shouting*): I will curse their foul image——

DONNINGTON (*calling, as JOSEPH moves up left*): Stop him!

HUGHES prevents JOSEPH from going out, and as DONNINGTON joins him SHAW and ELVIN now arrive from right.

DONNINGTON (*to SHAW and ELVIN*): Stop this Israelite—or they'll kill him too—and we'll have no guide.

They struggle for a moment, preventing JOSEPH from going out right. Then a distant shout—as if made simultaneously by a large body of men—is heard. The struggle ceases at once, and they all stare off right.

SHAW (*slowly*): They shout because the god has accepted the sacrifice.

ELVIN: We saw them bind him to the altar. They were all waiting for him—cruel swine, they're as bad as the Assyrians.

HUGHES: Now they're already beginning to march away.

ELVIN: Poor little devil—no Nineveh or Memphis or anything else for him!

JOSEPH slowly comes down and across, sick at heart. DONNINGTON comes down too, looking anxiously across at JOSEPH.

DONNINGTON (*to all of them*): We must go now—and quickly. (*Then to JOSEPH.*) Remember your word is pledged.

JOSEPH (*bitterly*): I have not forgotten.

DONNINGTON: I could do nothing. The captain insisted that they must have the youth for a sacrifice, and was sending men to fetch him—but I thought it would be better for the youth if I pretended he was merely going with them—and the drawing of the lots was a mere trick——

JOSEPH: You could have given him the swiftest animal and told him to escape——

DONNINGTON: Then we should all have been killed. (*Calling to the three men.*) Pack up these things. We must go at once. Hurry, hurry!

As they begin packing up, under his supervision, JOSEPH remains standing—a sombre figure—on one side.

JOSEPH: I was wrong to say that we must leave this place. Why should we make haste? We go from one place of evil only to another, and our iniquity goes with us. (*They stop and stare at him in bewilderment.*) “Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate . . .” (*He pauses for a moment, then cries with a kind of fierce exultation, dominating the scene.*) “And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? To whom will we flee for help? And where will ye leave your glory?”

As he stands there, and they stare at him, the curtain falls.

END OF INTERLUDE

ACT II

The scene is now as it was in Act I. But it is full morning. SHAW and HUGHES are sitting at each side of a ground sheet, and are busy cleaning a machine-gun. They are also sharing one cigarette and arguing loudly about football. The others cannot be seen.

HUGHES (*who has the cigarette, contemptuously*): Huddersfield!

SHAW (*aggressively*): Yes, 'Uddersfield. 'Ere, come on.

He reaches for the cigarette, then takes a deep drag at it while HUGHES watches him anxiously.

HUGHES: Huddersfield! Nothing to me, nothing at all! (*Takes cigarette.*)

SHAW: Ah dare say. But they played better bloody football nor Cardiff City ever did. 'Ere, an' go easy wi' that fag. It's like sharin' a fag with a suction pump.

HUGHES: Cardiff City. I care nothing at all about Cardiff City. Why—we don't think of Cardiff as a Welsh town at all. Swansea—Port Talbot—of course—very different—but Cardiff—no, we never think of it as a proper Welsh town. English—really.

SHAW: English! Course it's not English. Nay, ah know better nor that. Yer can't get aht of it that way.

HUGHES (*annoyed, loudly*): Get out of it! Let me tell you, I'm not trying to get out of anything. You won't stick to the point, man, that's your trouble, won't stick to the point.

SHAW (*annoyed, loudly*): Nah nobody can say ah don't stick to t'point. You started by sayin' that under this Beveridge Report every chap gets at least two pahnd ten a week——

HUGHES (*excitedly*): And then you talk about football and say what about Cardiff City—and I tell you I care nothing about Cardiff City——

SHAW (*loudly*): Yer went on abaht 'Uddersfield, didn't yer?

HUGHES (*loudly*): I only mentioned Huddersfield because you were beginning to insult Wales——

ELVIN *now comes out of the tent, where he has been looking after WICK. His ferocious expression stops both men as he comes across.*

ELVIN (*softly but very fiercely*): Turn it up—for Gawd's sake—turn it up. 'Ere's this poor little bleeder—won't tike nothin'—don't know

nobody—ready to 'and his bleedin' check in—an' all you two muckers can do is to argue the toss top o' yer voices. Get the sergeant—pronto.

HUGHES (*hastily*): I'll tell him.

He hurries off right while SHAW goes with ELVIN back to the tent and looks in.

SHAW (*dubiously*): 'Ow are yer, Georgie?

ELVIN (*quietly but urgently*): No use asking 'im. I tried that. But 'e don't know nobody—see? Talks to 'is Mum an' Dad an' 'is brother sometimes—see? But the pore little bleeder don't know none of us—'e don't know 'e's 'ere.

SHAW: Delirious—that's what 'e is.

ELVIN: I know, I know. I seen blokes like that when you was just learnin' to walk. When they're bad—yer see, Yorkie—they don't know where they are or what's 'appened to 'em—that's Nature, see?

SHAW: Better like that, isn't it?

ELVIN: Course it is. Bit o' kindness on Nature's part, that is, chummie. I've seen blokes wiv legs an' arms off—nuthink of 'em left, yer might say—finished an' for it, of course—but they didn't know nuthink—jus' felt a bit cold, that's all.

SHAW (*disgusted*): Arms an' legs off. Ah think we're all wrong in our (bloody) 'eads.

SERGEANT JOSEPH *hurries in from right, followed by* DONNINGTON.

JOSEPH: He's worse, is he?

ELVIN: Looks like it ter me, Sergeant. I can't do nuthink more for 'im. An' I thought I better go for some more water. (*Wistfully.*) Yer a clever bloke, Sergeant. Can't yer think o' something we could do for 'im?

JOSEPH: I'm afraid not, Knocker. I've done all I can think of. If he was in hospital they'd probably give him a blood transfusion.

ELVIN (*seriously*): 'E can 'ave a pint o' mine at any time.

JOSEPH: I know. But we couldn't work it. Don't even know if it would be right thing to do. Well, I'll look after him now.

ELVIN: I'll go an' brew some char.

Goes out right.

JOSEPH: Shaw, when you've finished cleaning that gun, go and join Hughes in the tank and see if you can do anything with the wireless.

SHAW: Right-o, Sergeant.

JOSEPH *goes into tent.* DONNINGTON *sits down with* SHAW.

DONNINGTON (*as he sits*): I'll give you a hand with this.

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SHAW: Can't yer get owt o' that wireless?

DONNINGTON: Not a thing.

SHAW: It's all right, isn't it?

DONNINGTON: Yes, *it's* all right. What's wrong is us. We're clean out of touch. We're lost.

SHAW: Well, if it depends on that bloody tank to get us out of it, we'll stay lost. It'll tak' lads in workshops a week or two to get 'er goin' again.

DONNINGTON (*gloomily*): If you ask me, by this time there's a few hundred miles of desert between us and the rest of the division. We don't know where they are, and they don't know where we are.

SHAW: That's abaht it, Corporal. But 'appen they'll send a recce plane.

DONNINGTON (*mocking him*): 'Appen they will an' all. But don't forget, one plane has spotted us already. That one of theirs, last night.

SHAW: Ay, ah wor forgettin' that. Well, what we goin' ter do?

DONNINGTON: Well, we're not going to start walking it.

SHAW: No fear. Besides, if we did, where'd we go?

DONNINGTON: You've said it. Where would we go? So we'll just have to stop here until somebody finds us.

SHAW: They'd better be sharp. We 'aven't much water in tank, an' that stuff along there's fairly crawlin'—an' there's none so much o' that. Ah went along there this mornin' wi' Kocker. An' then what about rations? Ah feels 'ungry now.

DONNINGTON: Then we'd better change the subject. What about Ossett? And those two girls you can't make up your mind about—what are their names?

SHAW: Nelly and Olive.

DONNINGTON (*reflectively*): I feel like Olive to-day. How about you?

SHAW: Either'd do me, though ah'd rather 'ave a good meat tea. Aaa!—when ah think what ah used to grumble at when ah wor at 'ome, nay ah could kick meself, ah could. Ah didn't know ah wor born.

DONNINGTON: I dreamt last night I was sitting down to roast duck and green peas with a beautiful blonde called Paula. And the wine waiter at the Savoy Grill—who for some reason or other looked and talked just like my Uncle Archie—was opening some champagne. But what the hell! I wasn't happy when I had all that, and now I'm miserable because I haven't it. What's the matter with us, Shaw?

ACT II

DESERT HIGHWAY

SHAW: Ah don't know about you. But ah can tell yer what's matter wi' me. Ah'm stuck 'ere in t'bloody desert, an' ah don't know 'ow ah'm goin' ter get aht of it.

DONNINGTON: We've always been stuck in a desert, if you ask me.

SHAW: Nay, ah 'aven't. Ossett's no desert.

DONNINGTON: I'll bet it would have looked like one to me. (*Quoting with rich but mocking emphasis.*) "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose." What a hope! But what words, eh? I can feel 'em down my spine.

SHAW: Well, ah can't. An' it's not words but a 'ell of a lot of water this desert 'ud 'ave before it starts blossoming as a rose.

DONNINGTON (*mockingly*): The Water of Life, Herbert, the Water of Life. (*Changes subject abruptly.*) Well, in a way I hope they do find us.

SHAW: Yer mean—the Jerries?

DONNINGTON: Yes. Then either we can make a fight of it—or we can't. And either way, it would be better than rotting away here.

JOSEPH (*coming out of tent, but not far*): Drop it, Phil. We're not rotting away yet.

DONNINGTON: Speak for yourself, Ben. I've been doing it quietly for years. How is he?

JOSEPH: He's a lot weaker. No pain. Seems quite comfortable, in fact. But I feel that's a bad sign.

DONNINGTON (*quietly*): Is he delirious?

JOSEPH: Yes, wandering a bit, poor kid.

As he withdraws into tent, ELVIN enters right, with two mugs of tea.

ELVIN: Cuppa char any good to 'im, Sarge?

JOSEPH (*just inside tent*): 'Fraid not, Knocker.

ELVIN: You 'ave one, Sarge?

JOSEPH: No thanks. Give it to the others.

Withdrawing completely.

ELVIN (*approaching the other two*): Cuppa sergeant-major's, Corporal?

DONNINGTON: Not for me, thanks, Knocker. Believe it or not, I don't like sergeant-major's tea.

ELVIN (*incredulous*): Go orn!

DONNINGTON: Fact. I'm not a real soldier at all, I haven't got the right ideas. Shaw here'll drink it.

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ELVIN (*handing over one mug*): I'll bet 'e will. Knows what's good for 'im, ol' Yorky does, silly as 'e looks.

He sits down himself and drinks.

SHAW: Ah'll drink 'alf an' tak' rest to Hughes, eh? (*Drinks.*)

ELVIN (*meditatively*): Yer can't believe it, can yer?

DONNINGTON: Believe what? That you're here?

ELVIN: The 'ole flamin' carry-on. I starts thinkin', see—while I'm brewin' that char. Yer knows 'ow things comes into the ol' loaf. I starts thinkin' o' the time after the last war when five 'undred of us comes back from India—see? An' I'm goin' ter get my ticket. An' every bleedin' thing goes my way that time, see? I'm just Dick Bloody Whittington. If they'd made me Lord Mayor, I wouldn't ha' bin surprised—though I wouldn't ha' touched it, nacherally. But I'm comin' back to get my ticket, see? An' plenty o' back pay an' special allowances. All right. Well, me an' a bloke called Kelly starts workin' the mudhook on the ship, you know, the old Crown and Anchor, an' don't forget there's five 'undred of us—all paid up, see? Well, we can't go wrong. The bees an' 'oney rolls in, see? The only trouble is tryin' to stop the blokes you've taken it from all day takin' it back again when they think yer asleep at night, see? But me an' Kelly kips together an' we take it in turns to 'ave our bit of shut-eye. So we gets to Tilbury—an' my share's a 'undred an' twenty quid, see?

SHAW (*staggered*): 'Undred an' twenty quid—just out o' Crown an' Anchor!

ELVIN: As true as I'm 'ere. So I gets 'ome, drinks twelve bottles o' Guinness—an' sleeps for about two days, see? Then I gets up an' goes to a barber's for a shave—'cos now I'm in the money I don't do nothin' for myself, see? An' there's a bloke in there called Ernie Pott—Fat Pott, we all call 'im—an' 'e's a racin' bloke—used ter be a tic-tac man for a big bookie—an' I says "Wotcher, Fat Pott," an' 'e says "Wotcher, me ol' cock sparrer"—an' I tells 'im I've just got me ticket an' back from India—an' what was the boys fancyin' for the Derby, see? So 'e tells me—Captain Cuttle—Steve Donoghue—an' 'e can get me tens. An' I can't go wrong, see? I puts seventy-five quid on Captain Cuttle—an' Steve brings 'im 'ome at ten ter one—an' I gets seven 'undred quid—

DONNINGTON: Why not seven hundred and fifty?

ELVIN: 'Cos I can't find one bookie—see? But I gets seven 'undred—an' I've still got a 'undred and fifty o' me own—so that's eight 'undred an' fifty quid—blimey, I felt like Solly Joel. Blokes come miles just to 'ave a look at me. An' just 'cos I'd got plenty, I 'adn't to buy them their pig's ear—oh no—they'd buy the drinks for me—see?

Course they was after a big touch—nacherally—but I could ha' bin drunk for weeks for nuthin'—just 'cos I'd got plenty. An' there I was—got me ticket—paid off—eight 'undred an' fifty quid—an' couldn't go wrong. *An' look at me now.* I 'ad ter tell myself I'm still the same bloke. I begun to think it must 'ave 'appened to somebody else.

SHAW (*rising, taking gun and tea*): If ah'd 'ad that much money, ah'd 'ave bought a good milk round.

ELVIN (*contemptuously*): Milk round! Strewth, I wouldn't 'ave one given. Go on, tell it to Taffy in there. I bet 'e'd like a nice milk round too. (*SHAW goes out. ELVIN makes a loud contemptuous noise.*) If some of those blokes we got now 'ad bin soldiering with the blokes I remember, they'd a bin torn to pieces. Like them young lads I met down at Cairo one time, who says "We won a battle, we oughter go 'ome now." "Cripes," I says, "yer soldiers now, not stayin' in a ruddy 'oliday camp. They never used ter let us go 'ome till our mothers didn't know us."

JOSEPH (*looking out of tent, quietly*): Phil.

He withdraws. DONNINGTON goes over to the tent. ELVIN, looking anxious, goes uncertainly in that direction, finally glances in the tent, then, spurred by what he sees in there, hurries across towards the tank. In another moment, he returns with HUGHES and SHAW, and the three of them, deeply concerned, cross to the tent, and stand awkwardly looking down into it. HUGHES' lips are moving, and after a moment or two, ELVIN notices this.

ELVIN (*seriously, in a whisper*): What yer mutterin' about?

HUGHES (*seriously, but rather shamefacedly*): I was praying.

ELVIN (*same tone*): That's all right, China. Wish I could.

They are now quiet and motionless, and for a few moments there is complete silence. At the end of this time, the three men, looking deeply troubled, exchange meaning glances, and then ELVIN nods his head. HUGHES goes away and sits down, his back turned to the audience, holding his head in his hands. The other two, turned to stone, still stare dumbly at the tent. Then, slowly, JOSEPH comes out of the tent. JOSEPH is carrying WICK'S identity disc, paybook, etc., and he slowly turns them over.

ELVIN (*very quietly*): Better keep 'im in that blanket, 'adn't we, Sergeant?

JOSEPH: Yes.

ELVIN (*hesitantly*): I'll just—sorta—see 'e's all right——

Goes into tent. DONNINGTON comes out of tent. SHAW moves slowly forward too, up to tent, but does not go in. JOSEPH sits down, and slowly, carefully, begins writing a report, occasionally referring

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to Wick's book, etc. DONNINGTON *moves restlessly, obviously afraid of letting himself go.*

DONNINGTON (to JOSEPH): Writing a report?

JOSEPH: Yes.

DONNINGTON (*half sneering*): Think anybody on our side is ever going to see it?

JOSEPH (*looking up, steadily*): Yes. Whatever happens to us, they'll see it sooner or later. And anyhow, it's got to be written.

DONNINGTON: I wish I could take it as coolly as you can.

JOSEPH: Don't get me wrong, Phil. This has got to be done—and I'd rather be doing something.

ELVIN *now comes out of tent, his face working and his voice unsteady.*

ELVIN: Christ!—he only looks about ten now—like a school kid fast asleep. (*After pause.*) Are we leavin' 'im there, Sergeant?

JOSEPH (*looking up*): Yes, for the time being. But we can't leave him too long. If it doesn't look as if we can get away from here soon, then we'll have to bury him.

DONNINGTON (*with bitter emphasis*): Here lies the body of George Wick, private soldier, aged twenty, who left the best farm in Long Micklem, Gloucestershire, to be shot to bits in the Syrian Desert—and——

ELVIN (*shouting furiously*): Yer don't 'ave to make a bleedin' mock o' the poor kid now, do yer? Stripes or no stripes, if I thought yer were makin' a mock of 'im—(*threatening him with fist*)—I'd push this right down yer bleedin' throat—see?

DONNINGTON (*angrily*): Why—you talkin' baboon—I was as fond of the kid as you were—and I'm not making a mock of him—as you call it. I'm only making a mock of the whole God-damned crazy set-up—and I'm doing it because if I don't try for a laugh, I'll either cry or go mad. What was he doing here, poor little devil? What are we all doing here? What's it all about anyhow? We've had two of these wars with a few assorted massacres and mass starvation in between, and I'll bet there are fat-bellied swine at home now making plans that'll land us into World War Number Three. If there has to be shooting, then let's go and shoot some of those jackasses and greedy-guts for a change——

JOSEPH (*getting up, sternly*): Corporal Donnington, if anything happens to me, you'll be in charge here.

DONNINGTON: So what?

JOSEPH: That kind of talk isn't going to help the situation. What are men going to think if they hear an N.C.O. talking like that?

DONNINGTON (*tearing off the stripes from his left arm and throwing them down, angrily*): Take the stripes. I don't want 'em. Never did.

ELVIN: Now listen, Sarge. 'E's upset, same as we all are. An' it's my fault, I thought 'e was making a mock o' poor young Georgie—see?

JOSEPH: All right, Elvin. I know all about it. Get back on your job. You two—(*to HUGHES and SHAW*)—as well. Come on now—get going. (*The three men go out right. JOSEPH watches them go, then turns to DONNINGTON.*) Pick those stripes up, Corporal. You'll need 'em.

DONNINGTON *picks them up, then looks at JOSEPH.*

DONNINGTON: I'm sorry for that outburst, Ben.

JOSEPH: All right. Let's forget it. Knocker was quite right. That kid's death has knocked us all sideways—it's one thing seeing a few fellows killed in action, when you're too busy to take much notice, and it's quite another thing when it happens like this. So you had to let steam off.

DONNINGTON: Thanks, Ben. But there's more than that in it. I've been feeling it more and more for a long time now. A sort of angry despair. What the hell! Nobody learns anything and nobody wants to. We're all wandering about in a colossal lunatic asylum. You heard what the ABCA chap at brigade headquarters said. Quite apart from the war casualties, which run into millions and millions on the Russian front, over two million people executed in Poland, about three-quarters of a million in Yugoslavia, half a million deported to penal servitude in Czechoslovakia. Half Europe starving to death. Old men digging their graves. School girls shipped like cattle to brothels—

JOSEPH (*sharply*): You needn't tell me these things. Haven't they been happening more to my people than to anybody else?

DONNINGTON (*rather sharply*): All right, all right. You know what's been happening to your people, even before this war started—

JOSEPH: Thousands of years before this war started. Two thousand five hundred years ago, the Assyrians and then the Babylonians were driving my people into slavery—perhaps across this very ground we're standing on now. If that thing—(*pointing to the top of the stone idol*)—could speak, it could probably tell us a long long tale of suffering—yes, of Jewish suffering.

DONNINGTON: I dare say it could. I know your history. But it's even worse now—don't forget that. The Nazis could teach the Assyrians and Babylonians and Egyptians a thing or two about slavery, torture and mass murder. Look what—

JOSEPH (*sharply, breaking in*): I say, you needn't tell me. I know. I don't only know it here—(*touching his forehead but putting his hand on his heart*)—but I also know it here—where it hurts. Many and many

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a night I've been unable to sleep, thinking about it, feeling it—this hellish horror. So what can you tell me about it that I don't know and haven't felt already? Nothing—nothing—nothing.

DONNINGTON: All right. But you can't blame me for breaking out and damning and blasting the whole lunatic set-up, the hell on earth we've made and look like going on making. That's why I'm here—when I needn't have been—not because I'm patriotic—I can't swallow that gab, specially when its handed out to me by fellows who'd sell you anything and anybody for money, fellows who made it all stink for me before the war—no, I came out here—because—because——

JOSEPH (*firmly breaking in*): You came out here to do your duty.

DONNINGTON: I didn't come out here to do my duty. I haven't any duty that brings me here. The world's not worth fighting for. We're a lot of blind maggots in a rotten carcase. I only came out here because if I'd stayed at home much longer, I'd have drunk myself paralytic——

JOSEPH: Well, why didn't you stay and drink yourself paralytic?

DONNINGTON: Trying to be funny?

JOSEPH: No. You say that nothing matters, the world's not worth fighting for, and we're all a lot of blind maggots. Well, if that's true what does it matter if you stay at home—and lie and cheat and dodge and swindle—and drink yourself paralytic?

DONNINGTON: Because I don't want to be that kind of chap.

JOSEPH: All right. You don't want to be that kind of chap. And all these horrors and miseries you talk so much about make you angry and despairing. They do something to you.

DONNINGTON: Of course they do something to me. They ought to do something to you too.

JOSEPH: Leave me out of it for a minute. But if they do something to you, and if you don't want to be that kind of chap, then you can't say nothing matters and there's no meaning in anything and that you're a blind maggot. Obviously there's something inside you—the something that gets angry or feels despair—that matters a lot. And what interests me isn't all that stuff you're talking, but that *something*. And it's that something I've been thinking about for some time now. I've been through all that, and now I'm coming out at the other end.

DONNINGTON: What other end?

JOSEPH: Listen! (*They listen carefully. We don't hear anything yet.*)

DONNINGTON: Plane?

JOSEPH: Yes. (*They stare through field-glasses.*)

DONNINGTON: One of ours, I think.

JOSEPH: Can't tell yet.

ACT II

DESERT HIGHWAY

DONNINGTON: No it isn't.

JOSEPH: One of theirs all right. Looks like the same plane that gunned us last night. (*We now hear the plane distantly.*) Here, we're taking no chances this time. (*Calling.*) Elvin.

ELVIN (*off right*): Yers?

JOSEPH (*calling*): Plane! Man the bren. The rest of you take cover. Come on, Phil.

They hurry off right to get into the tank. The plane approaches and comes very low and we have the same roar and shadow effect as in Act I. But this time there is no machine-gunning. We hear the plane go away before we hear the men's voices. HUGHES runs in from right, followed by ELVIN and SHAW.

HUGHES: Over there. I saw it distinctly.

SHAW: I can't see owt.

ELVIN: No, 'e dropped something all right. Let Ser'n't Joseph 'ave a decco with his glasses. Look out, Taffy.

HUGHES: Over there, Sergeant. Look where I'm pointing.

JOSEPH (*off*): I know. I saw him drop it.

After a moment's pause, JOSEPH and DONNINGTON enter right, looking through their glasses somewhere off.

ELVIN: What's the idea? Don't tell me ol' Jerry's started droppin' us a few eggs for breakfast.

DONNINGTON: Might be a little D.A. bomb.

JOSEPH: Doesn't look it to me.

ELVIN: Yer think it's the milk an' the mornin' pipers—see? And then when yer try to collect—up she goes.

SHAW: Let it alone, ah say.

ELVIN: Remember them tins o' fags on the table in the Jerry camp? Young Oosit—bloke with a squint from Brum—makes a rush for 'em —an' the next minute 'is arm's gone—see?

HUGHES: Up to every kind of dirty trick, they are. Remember what the Engineer sergeant told us?

ELVIN: Go on. I wouldn't listen to an Engineer sergeant if 'e told me my flamin' 'ouse was on fire.

JOSEPH (*after a pause*): I think it's a message of some sort. I'm going to get it.

DONNINGTON: Do you want anybody to come with you?

JOSEPH: No.

He hurries out left. The others watch him, throughout the following dialogue.

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ELVIN: There aren't many blokes with three tapes up that 'ud go an' do a job like that by themselves.

HUGHES: That is true. Sergeant Joseph will always take the risk himself.

ELVIN: That big-mouthed lance-jack who got 'imself transferred to 'edquarters—yer know the bloke I mean——

SHAW: Smithers.

ELVIN: That's right. Well, this big-mouthed Smithers says to me one time, 'e says, "That ser'n't o' yours is a teapot." So I says, "Well, what if 'e is?" So 'e says, "Well, I don't like yids." So I says, "No, an' neither does 'Itler. Yer fighting on the wrong bloody side, cock."

DONNINGTON: Good for you, Knocker.

ELVIN: Yids is like other people. There are good 'uns an' bad 'uns. But when they're good, they *are* good, see? Like Sergeant Joseph. So don't let's 'ear any more from you, Taffy.

HUGHES (*falling for it, indignantly*): From me? What do you mean—*from me*? Have I ever said one single word against Sergeant Joseph?

DONNINGTON: Button it. He's only pulling your leg. (*Looks through his glasses while the others stare and wait.*)

SHAW: Sergeant's pickin' it up, isn't he?

DONNINGTON: Yes. He's taking the tin off the parachute now. If anything's going to happen, it'll happen now.

HUGHES: Making me sweat.

ELVIN: You'd sweat 'arder, chummie, if you was shakin' that tin can.

DONNINGTON: He's taking the top off.

SHAW: Steady. Nah—steady, lad.

DONNINGTON: He's found a piece of paper inside. He's looking at it. He's reading it. It must be a message.

ELVIN (*singing*): "Inside it was a message,
With these words written on:
Whoever finds this bottle,
Finds the beer all gone."

DONNINGTON (*after pause*): He's waving it. He's coming back. (*Stops looking through glasses, and sits down. The others sit too.*)

ELVIN: Four pints o' bitter an' can we 'ave the darts?

SHAW: Nay, don't start that, Knocker. It's bad enough without tormentin' ourselves.

DONNINGTON (*facetiously*): True for you, 'Erbert.

ELVIN: I'll bet they 'aven't got round to darts yet, up in Ossett.

SHAW: We used to 'ave a team at t'Are an' 'Ounds 'at 'ad beat onny team you Cockney lads could put up.

ELVIN (*mocking him*): 'Tare an' 'Ounds! Now, listen, Yorky——

DONNINGTON (*rather sharply*): Turn it up, Knocker. We might have to do a bit of thinking in a minute.

ELVIN: If yer goin' to do a bit o' thinkin' on the water question, yer can't start too soon.

SHAW: Ay, d'yer remember them three Recce Corps chaps they brought in after they'd bin lost? Aaa—by gow—they couldn't talk--couldn't even swaller at first——

DONNINGTON (*sharply*): All right. We've got the idea.

SHAW: Well, ah'm only sayin'.

DONNINGTON: All right. We know what you're saying and we don't want it. We happen to be lost too. Now keep quiet—this may be serious.

They watch expectantly, watching SERGEANT JOSEPH off left. After a few moments, he arrives left hurriedly—hot, mopping himself, and carrying a piece of paper.

DONNINGTON: It's a message, isn't it?

JOSEPH (*sitting down*): Yes.

DONNINGTON: In English?

JOSEPH: Near enough.

SHAW: But that Jerry plane dropped it—eh?

JOSEPH: Yes. And this is what it says. (*Reads slowly and impressively.*) "Your armoured unit has retreated South-East. You are now cut off. If you will show white flag or any surrender token when we return this evening we will drop food and water in the morning to last until our panzer troops reach you in three or four days time." Is that clear to everybody?

HUGHES: No, Sergeant, I'm a bit confused about it.

JOSEPH (*carefully*): According to them, we're completely cut off. They're coming back this way to-night. If we show them a white flag or any other sign that shows we're ready to surrender, then when they come this way in the morning they'll drop us enough food and water to last until we're captured.

DONNINGTON (*without any inflection*): And if we don't look as if we're surrendering——?

JOSEPH: They don't say anything about that. They might try bombing or machine-gunning us.

DONNINGTON: Or they might think it cheaper and easier to leave us here—to rot.

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JOSEPH: Right.

ELVIN: 'Ere, 'alf a minute—'ow do we know them Jerries is tellin' the truth——?

JOSEPH: We don't know. Our chaps may not have retreated to the South-East at all, and we may not be completely cut off.

DONNINGTON: But we're not getting them on the wireless?

JOSEPH: No, we're not.

DONNINGTON: So they may have gone, and we may be cut off.

JOSEPH: Right. (*Looking at them.*) Well, there it is. You know everything I know.

SHAW: 'Ow much water we got now?

ELVIN: Precious bloody little real water. An' even that 'crawlin' green stuff along there's not goin' ter last more than another three days.

JOSEPH: True.

SHAW: At that rate we'll 'ave our tongues 'anging out day after ter-morrer—same as them chaps——

ELVIN: Oh—turn it up! We know. They got us by the short 'airs.

JOSEPH rises and slowly moves away from them, as they look questioningly and dubiously at each other. Then he turns.

JOSEPH: Well, Phil, this is where the debate continues. You were telling me just before that plane came over and dropped its ultimatum that we were all a lot of fools and lunatics anyhow and that nothing mattered. It sounded just a lot of talk then—but now it isn't, you see. We've got to make a decision and act on it.

DONNINGTON: You're asking me what I think we ought to do?

JOSEPH: Yes.

DONNINGTON: All right then. I stick to what I said. I think we're a lot of bloody fools to be here—and that nothing's going to get any better but probably worse——

JOSEPH: And so to-night we show a white flag—eh?

ELVIN (*angrily*): *What?*

DONNINGTON: No. Being a bloody fool and being here—I say—*no surrender.*

ELVIN (*bursting out*): An' I should think not. They'll get no bleedin' white flag out o' me—the murdering lyin' baskets.

JOSEPH: No surrender, eh?

DONNINGTON AND ELVIN (*together*): No.

JOSEPH: Shaw?

SHAW: Same 'ere.

JOSEPH: Hughes?

HUGHES: Certainly not indeed. I should feel ashamed for the rest of my life, and what's the use of living at all if you're going to feel ashamed all the time?

JOSEPH: No use. All right, boys. That's the way I thought you'd take it. Thanks.

DONNINGTON: But supposing we hadn't? Supposing we'd all been in favour of surrendering?

JOSEPH (*grimly*): Then we'd have had another little war of our own just here. (*Breaking it.*) Shaw, get back on the wireless again. See if that battery's woken up yet. One of us will relieve you in about half an hour. Keep on sending as well as listening.

SHAW (*going*): All right, Sergeant. (*He goes off right.*)

JOSEPH: Better boil some of that well water, Knocker. And Hughes, bring the other gun out and we'll give it a good clean up. We may be wanting to use it soon.

HUGHES: Certainly, certainly.

HUGHES and ELVIN *go off right*. JOSEPH *sits down with his report again and begins writing*.

DONNINGTON (*after a pause*): I never pretended to be consistent, y'know, Ben.

JOSEPH: No, you talk one way and act quite another way.

DONNINGTON: But I'm still wondering what you meant when you said you'd been through all that and were now coming out at the other end. You remember—I asked you "What other end?" And then we heard the plane. What did you mean?

JOSEPH (*slowly*): Well, you see, Phil—I'm a Jew.

DONNINGTON: You needn't bring that into it.

JOSEPH: I must.

DONNINGTON: But don't you see—if it's all going to turn on your being a Jew, then it's merely something special to you—and the other Jews—a few million at the most? And at the same time it's not going to mean anything to me—and the other fellows here—none of us Jews—and the thousand million other men who are wondering what it's all about.

JOSEPH: No. The way I see it, this means something to everybody. I'm only starting by explaining that I'm a Jew. Now this is very much our war—isn't it?

DONNINGTON: It ought to be.

JOSEPH: It is. (HUGHES *enters from right with gun*. DONNINGTON *spreads ground sheet*, and HUGHES *begins to clean gun*.) You know

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what's been happening to the Jews? First in Germany and Austria. Then in Czechoslovakia and Poland. And in the Nazi-occupied Ukraine, where old men, women, children have been packed into sealed trucks and gassed to death, where girls have been raped and then butchered, where children have been buried alive or had their brains bashed out. Every horror, every terror, every possible kind of mass murder. To destroy the Jews, to blot us out altogether, to wipe us from the face of the earth.

DONNINGTON: Yes, we know all about that. And it's mad and filthy. We're fighting to stop it.

JOSEPH: Even though nothing matters very much?

DONNINGTON: Don't harp on that. Even though we live in a ridiculous and cruel world that never learns anything, some of us don't like madness and filth.

HUGHES: Quite right, Corporal.

JOSEPH: Even if you don't know why?

DONNINGTON: Yes, even if we don't know why.

HUGHES: It isn't clean and decent. It's against everything we've been taught to believe. Though, mind you, Sergeant, with all due respect to you, I know people who don't like Jews and sometimes they seem to have good reasons.

DONNINGTON: Steady, Hughes.

JOSEPH: No, that's all right. I can understand that. We're a people who've had our wits sharpened—and sometimes been made unscrupulous—by hundreds of years of persecution and insecurity. A lot of our people behave rather badly. They're too sharp, too smart, make too much noise, are too pleased with themselves. But that's not what Hitler and the Nazis dislike about the Jews, nor why they want to destroy us. Their anti-Jewish madness is something quite different from ordinary prejudice.

DONNINGTON: I'll agree with that, Ben. But what is it they're after? Why do they invent all this fantastic nonsense about you Jews?

JOSEPH (*with growing urgency and force*): Because they want to destroy, once and for all, that idea which the two tribes of Judæa have never quite lost—the idea of the great invisible Lord of Hosts, the one God of righteousness, to whom every man belongs, and to whom every man is precious, and who should reign on earth, through man's free choice, as He reigns in Heaven.

DONNINGTON: And why should they want to do that?

JOSEPH (*passionately*): Because while that idea is still working in men's minds, the iron empires of fraud and force, of police and machines, of torture and murder, can never feel secure.

ACT II

DESERT HIGHWAY

HUGHES (*fervently*): I agree with you, Sergeant—I do indeed. And, my word, you're quite a preacher.

DONNINGTON: That's the trouble, so far as I'm concerned. It sounds to me just like so much preaching. We're in a tough spot here. And I don't care about pie in the sky.

JOSEPH (*with force*): I'm not talking about pie in the sky. I'm talking about saving this world here and now, saving it from men's terrible destructiveness, passion, greed and fear.

DONNINGTON: That's more like it.

JOSEPH: But it's the same thing. Unless men believe that they belong to the eternal God of righteousness, who must have His Kingdom of compassion and fellowship and love here on earth, they'll destroy themselves and all they possess. Instead of beauty, there shall be burning. They won't go to some distant hell, they'll be in hell here.

DONNINGTON (*seriously*): I'll grant you that part. The hell on earth has started all right.

JOSEPH: Our great prophets once came striding out of these deserts to warn the kings and the rich men and the false priests that only the worship of the unseen God of righteousness would save the people from destruction. The ten tribes of the Northern kingdom refused to listen to them, and then when the Assyrians—the Nazis of that time—mopped up the place and drove most of them to another part of the Assyrian Empire, these ten tribes completely disappeared, because they'd lost their identity.

DONNINGTON: The ten lost tribes, eh? But what about the other two?

JOSEPH: They never lost their identity no matter what happened to them, because they never lost their sense of the one great invisible Lord God who was outside all the machinery of this world, who wasn't simply men's passions and lusts personified, or mere force, or the state. And the Nazis and all the people like them who are trying to destroy us are doing it because they're trying to destroy any hold that idea has on men's minds, so that they can turn people into blind, unthinking, unfeeling masses—sleep-walkers, robots, slaves of the machines. And *that's* what we're fighting.

DONNINGTON: That's what we may be fighting against. But what are we fighting for? The Bank of England and the Federation of British Industries and Carlton Club democracy?

JOSEPH: No, we're fighting for the real democracy, which is something more than having an occasional vote. It's the belief that all human beings are precious to God, and that therefore all human

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beings must be precious to each other, and that the will of God shall be done on earth as it is in heaven.

DONNINGTON (*with mocking gesture at the desert*): It looks like it, doesn't it?

JOSEPH (*quoting emphatically*): Make straight in the desert a high-way for our God.

HUGHES (*quoting with enthusiasm*): "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads! They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

ELVIN (*who has entered quietly*): An' everythink in the garden's luvly. But when does all this start 'appenin'?

JOSEPH (*firmly*): It starts happening when we trust in the strength of God—and *make it happen*.

ELVIN: Well, I oughta warn yer, Sergeant, that by this time ter-morrer we'll 'ave abaht a mug o' water each—an' then finish.

JOSEPH (*fiercely*): All right, Knocker.

KNOCKER: An' that don't mean I'm suggestin' any bleedin' white flags of surrender neither. (*Glares round, then sits.*)

JOSEPH: All right, all right. We'll start cutting the water down to the very minimum to-day. And don't forget I've got those two tins of fruit. They'll help us out a bit.

DONNINGTON: I've got a tin too that goes into the kitty.

ELVIN: Well, Taffy, yer better make up yer mind to get yer everlasting joy an' gladness out o' your share o' three tins o' fruit an' 'alf a mug o' slimy water. (*To them all.*) But what is all this, any'ow? Beveridge Report? League o' Nations? Or 'ave yer got religion?

JOSEPH (*in ringing confident tone*): It's all three, Knocker. It's our hope, our future, our life. (*Now, as he continues, quietly at first, he picks up a small Bible that has been among Wick's possessions.*) About twenty-six hundred years ago, which was a time rather like this, with huge armies on the move and cities burning, from the desert not a long way from here there came a prophet called Micah the Morasthite. And he had listened to the voice from the heart of the silence, and had seen visions in the darkness of the night. It's all here in this Bible that belonged to Georgie Wick. (*Reads in title page, quietly.*) "Georgie, from his loving Mother on his eighteenth birthday——"

ELVIN (*uneasily*): Take it easy, Sergeant. I was terrible fond o' young Georgie. So don't rub it in.

JOSEPH (*quietly*): I'm not trying to rub it in. I'm trying to rub it out. He died for something, not for nothing. And this is what the prophet

Micah said to the unhappy people of that time, and what he's still saying to us: (*Reads quietly.*) "But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it."

"And the Lord shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

"But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts hath spoken it. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever."

HUGHES (*seriously*): Amen!

ELVIN: Well, I don't know. If you'll change that vine an' fig tree—'cos I don't want to sit under any bleedin' vine an' fig tree—but if yer change that for sittin' in the Royal Oak or the Red Lion—I'll say Amen too. (*Enter SHAW from right.*)

SHAW: Sergeant, Sergeant! There's some life in that battery. Ah can 'ear something—but ah can't make out what it is yet.

DONNINGTON (*holding up his hand*): Wait a minute. I can hear something too. Listen!

JOSEPH: It's a plane.

As they listen, we can just hear it in the distance. Gradually they turn their heads and look up in the same direction.

DONNINGTON: It's a plane all right.

JOSEPH: But—ours or theirs?

The plane is nearer and they are still staring as the curtain slowly comes down.

END OF PLAY

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

A Play in Three Acts

TO
MICHAEL MACOWAN

CHARACTERS

ARTHUR BIRLING
SYBIL BIRLING
SHEILA BIRLING
ERIC BIRLING
GERALD CROFT
EDNA
INSPECTOR GOOLE

ACTS

All three acts, which are continuous, take place in the dining-room of the Birlings' house in Brumley, an industrial city in the North Midlands. It is an evening in spring, 1912.

An Inspector Calls—Copyright, 1945, by J. B. Priestley

“An Inspector Calls” was first produced at The New Theatre in October, 1946, with the following cast:

ARTHUR BIRLING	JULIEN MITCHELL
GERALD CROFT	HARRY ANDREWS
SHEILA BIRLING	MARGARET LEIGHTON
SYBIL BIRLING	MARIAN SPENCER
EDNA	MARJORIE DUNKELS
ERIC BIRLING	ALEC GUINNESS
INSPECTOR GOOLE	RALPH RICHARDSON

The play produced by BASIL DEAN

ACT I

The dining-room of a fairly large suburban house, belonging to a prosperous manufacturer. It has good solid furniture of the period. The general effect is substantial and heavily comfortable, but not cosy and homelike. (If a realistic set is used, then it should be swung back, as it was in the Old Vic production at the New Theatre. By doing this, you can have the dining-table centre downstage during Act I, when it is needed there, and then, swinging back, can reveal the fireplace for Act II, and then for Act III can show a small table with telephone on it, downstage of fireplace; and by this time the dining-table and its chairs have moved well upstage. Producers who wish to avoid this tricky business, which involves two re-settings of the scene and some very accurate adjustments of the extra flats necessary, would be well advised to dispense with an ordinary realistic set, if only because the dining-table becomes a nuisance. The lighting should be pink and intimate until the INSPECTOR arrives, and then it should be brighter and harder.)

At rise of curtain, the four BIRLINGS and GERALD are seated at the table, with ARTHUR BIRLING at one end, his wife at the other, ERIC downstage, and SHEILA and GERALD seated upstage. EDNA, the parlour-maid, is just clearing the table, which has no cloth, of dessert plates and champagne glasses, etc., and then replacing them with decanter of port, cigar box and cigarettes. Port glasses are already on the table. All five are in evening dress of the period, the men in tails and white ties, not dinner-jackets. ARTHUR BIRLING is a heavy-looking, rather portentous man in his middle fifties with fairly easy manners but rather provincial in his speech. His wife is about fifty, a rather cold woman and her husband's social superior. SHEILA is a pretty girl in her early twenties, very pleased with life and rather excited. GERALD CROFT is an attractive chap about thirty, rather too manly to be a dandy but very much the easy well-bred young man-about-town. ERIC is in his early twenties, not quite at ease, half shy, half assertive. At the moment they have all had a good dinner, are celebrating a special occasion, and are pleased with themselves.

BIRLING: Giving us the port, Edna? That's right. (He pushes it towards ERIC.) You ought to like this port, Gerald. (As a matter of fact, Finchley told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him.)

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(GERALD: Then it'll be all right. The governor prides himself on being a good judge of port. I don't pretend to know much about it.

SHEILA (*gaily, possessively*): I should jolly well think not, Gerald. I'd hate you to know all about port—like one of these purple-faced old men.

BIRLING: Here, I'm not a purple-faced old man.

SHEILA: No, not yet. But then you don't know all about port—do you?'

BIRLING (*noticing that his wife has not taken any*): Now then, Sybil, you must take a little to-night. Special occasion, y'know, eh?

SHEILA: Yes, go on, Mummy. You must drink our health.

MRS. BIRLING (*smiling*): Very well, then. Just a little, thank you. (*To EDNA, who is about to go, with tray.*) All right, Edna. I'll ring from the drawing-room when we want coffee. Probably in about half an hour.

EDNA (*going*): Yes, ma'am.

EDNA *goes out. They now have all the glasses filled. BIRLING beams at them and clearly relaxes.*

BIRLING: Well, well—this is very nice. Very nice. Good dinner too, Sybil. Tell cook from me.

(GERALD (*politely*): Absolutely first-class.

(MRS. BIRLING (*reproachfully*): Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things——

BIRLING: Oh—come, come—I'm treating Gerald like one of the family. And I'm sure he won't object.

SHEILA (*with mock aggressiveness*): Go on, Gerald—just you object!

GERALD (*smiling*): Wouldn't dream of it. In fact, I insist upon being one of the family now. I've been trying long enough, haven't I? (*As she does not reply, with more insistence.*) Haven't I? You know I have.

MRS. BIRLING (*smiling*): Of course she does.

SHEILA (*half serious, half playful*): Yes—except for all last summer, when you never came near me, and I wondered what had happened to you.

GERALD: And I've told you—I was awfully busy at the works all that time.

SHEILA (*same tone as before*): Yes, that's what *you* say.

MRS. BIRLING: Now, Sheila, don't tease him. When you're married you'll realise that men with important work to do sometimes have to

spend nearly all their time and energy on their business. You'll have to get used to that, just as I had.

SHEILA: I don't believe I will. (*Half playful, half serious, to GERALD.*) So you be careful.

GERALD: Oh—I will, I will.

ERIC *suddenly guffaws. His parents look at him.*

SHEILA (*severely*): Now—what's the joke?

ERIC: I don't know—really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh.

SHEILA: You're squiffy.

ERIC: I'm not.

MRS. BIRLING: What an expression, Sheila! Really, the things you girls pick up these days!

ERIC: If you think that's the best she can do-----

SHEILA: Don't be an ass, Eric.

MRS. BIRLING: Now stop it, you two. Arthur, what about this famous toast of yours?

BIRLING: Yes, of course. (*Clears his throat.*) Well, Gerald, I know you agreed that we should only have this quiet little family party. It's a pity Sir George and—er—Lady Croft can't be with us, but they're abroad and so it can't be helped. As I told you, they sent me a very nice cable—couldn't be nicer. I'm not sorry that we're celebrating quietly like this—

MRS. BIRLING: Much nicer really.

GERALD: I agree.

BIRLING: So do I, but it makes speech-making more difficult—

ERIC (*not too rudely*): Well, don't do any. We'll drink their health and have done with it.

BIRLING: No, we won't. It's one of the happiest nights of my life. And one day, I hope, Eric, when you've a daughter of your own, you'll understand why. Gerald, I'm going to tell you frankly, without any pretences, that your engagement to Sheila means a tremendous lot to me. She'll make you happy, and I'm sure you'll make her happy. You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted. Your father and I have been friendly rivals in business for some time now—though Crofts Limited are both older and bigger than Birling and Company—and now you've brought us together, and perhaps we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together—for lower costs and higher prices.

GERALD: Hear, hear! And I think my father would agree to that.

MRS. BIRLING: Now, Arthur, I don't think you ought to talk business on an occasion like this.

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SHEILA: Neither do I. All wrong.

BIRLING: Quite so, I agree with you. I only mentioned it in passing. What I did want to say was—that Sheila's a lucky girl—and I think you're a pretty fortunate young man too, Gerald.

GERALD: I know I am—this once anyhow.

BIRLING (*raising his glass*): So here's wishing the pair of you—the very best that life can bring. Gerald and Sheila.

MRS. BIRLING (*raising her glass, smiling*): Yes, Gerald. Yes, Sheila darling. Our congratulations and very best wishes!

GERALD: Thank you.

MRS. BIRLING: Eric!

ERIC (*rather noisily*): All the best! She's got a nasty temper sometimes—but she's not bad really. Good old Sheila!

SHEILA: Chump! I can't drink to this, can I? When do I drink?

GERALD: You can drink to me.

SHEILA (*quiet and serious now*): All right then. I drink to you, Gerald.

(*For a moment they look at each other.*)

GERALD (*quietly*): Thank you. And I drink to you—and hope I can make you as happy as you deserve to be.

SHEILA (*trying to be light and easy*): You be careful—or I'll start weeping.

GERALD (*smiling*): Well, perhaps this will help to stop it. (*He produces a ring case.*)

SHEILA (*excited*): Oh—Gerald—you've got it—is it the one you wanted me to have?

GERALD (*giving the case to her*): Yes—the very one.

SHEILA (*taking out the ring*): Oh—it's wonderful! Look—Mummy— isn't it a beauty? Oh—darling—— (*She kisses GERALD hastily.*)

ERIC: Steady the Buffs!

SHEILA (*who has put ring on, admiringly*): I think it's perfect. Now I really feel engaged.

MRS. BIRLING: So you ought, darling. It's a lovely ring. Be careful with it.

SHEILA: Careful! I'll never let it go out of my sight for an instant.

MRS. BIRLING (*smiling*): Well, it came just at the right moment. That was clever of you, Gerald. Now, Arthur, if you've no more to say, I think Sheila and I had better go into the drawing-room and leave you men——

BIRLING (*rather heavily*): I just want to say this. (*Noticing that*

ACT I

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

SHEILA *is still admiring her ring.*) Are you listening, Sheila? This concerns you too. And after all I don't often make speeches at you——

SHEILA: I'm sorry, Daddy. Actually I was listening.

She looks attentive, as they all do. He holds them for a moment before continuing.

BIRLING: I'm delighted about this engagement and I hope it won't be too long before you're married. And I want to say this. There's a good deal of silly talk about these days—but—and I speak as a hard-headed business man, who has to take risks and know what he's about—I say, you can ignore all this silly pessimistic talk. When you marry, you'll be marrying at a very good time. Yes, a very good time—and soon it'll be an even better time. (Last month, just because the miners came out on strike, there's a lot of wild talk about possible labour trouble in the near future. Don't worry. We've passed the worst of it. We employers at last are coming together to see that our interests—and the interests of Capital—are properly protected. And we're in for a time of steadily increasing prosperity.)

GERALD: I believe you're right, sir.

ERIC: What about war?

BIRLING: Glad you mentioned it, Eric. I'm coming to that. Just because the Kaiser makes a speech or two, or a few German officers have too much to drink and begin talking nonsense, you'll hear some people say that war's inevitable. And to that I say—fiddlesticks! The Germans don't want war. Nobody wants war, except some half-civilised folks in the Balkans. And why? There's too much at stake these days. Everything to lose and nothing to gain by war.

ERIC: Yes, I know—but still——

BIRLING: Just let me finish, Eric. You've a lot to learn yet. And I'm talking as a hard-headed, practical man of business. And I say there isn't a chance of war. The world's developing so fast that it'll make war impossible. Look at the progress we're making. (In a year or two we'll have aeroplanes that will be able to go anywhere. And look at the way the automobile's making headway—bigger and faster all the time. And then ships. Why, a friend of mine went over this new liner last week—the *Titanic*—she sails next week—forty-six thousand eight hundred tons—forty-six thousand eight hundred tons—New York in five days—and every luxury—and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable. That's what you've got to keep your eye on, facts like that, progress like that—and not a few German officers talking nonsense and a few scaremongers here making a fuss about nothing. Now you three young people, just listen to this—and remember what I'm telling you now.) In twenty or thirty years' time—let's say, in 1940

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—you may be giving a little party like this—your son or daughter might be getting engaged—and I tell you by that time you'll be living in a world that'll have forgotten all these Capital versus Labour agitations and all these silly little war scares. There'll be peace and prosperity and rapid progress everywhere—except of course in Russia, which will always be behindhand, naturally.

MRS. BIRLING: Arthur!

As MRS. BIRLING shows signs of interrupting.

BIRLING: Yes, my dear, I know—I'm talking too much. But you youngsters just remember what I said. We can't let these Bernard Shaws and H. G. Wellses do all the talking. We hard-headed practical business men must say something sometime. And we don't guess—we've had experience—and we *know*.

MRS. BIRLING (*rising. The others rise*): Yes, of course, dear. Well—don't keep Gerald in here too long. Eric—I want you a minute.

She and SHEILA and ERIC go out. BIRLING and GERALD sit down again.

BIRLING: Cigar?

GERALD: No, thanks. Can't really enjoy them.

BIRLING (*taking one himself*): Ah, you don't know what you're missing. I like a good cigar. (*Indicating decanter.*) Help yourself.

GERALD: Thank you.

BIRLING lights his cigar and GERALD, who has lit a cigarette, helps himself to port then pushes decanter to BIRLING.

BIRLING: Thanks. (*Confidentially.*) By the way, there's something I'd like to mention—in strict confidence—while we're by ourselves. I have an idea that your mother—Lady Croft—while she doesn't object to my girl—feels you might have done better for yourself socially—

GERALD, rather embarrassed, begins to murmur some dissent, but BIRLING checks him.

No, Gerald, that's all right. Don't blame her. She comes from an old county family—landed people and so forth—and so it's only natural. But what I wanted to say is—there's a fair chance that I might find my way into the next Honours List. Just a knighthood, of course.

GERALD: Oh—I say—congratulations!

BIRLING: Thanks. But it's a bit too early for that. So don't say anything. But I've had a hint or two. (You see, I was Lord Mayor here two years ago when Royalty visited us. And I've always been regarded as a sound useful party man.) So—well—I gather there's a very good chance of a knighthood—so long as we behave ourselves, don't get into the police court or start a scandal—eh? (*Laughs complacently.*)

(GERALD *laughs*): You seem to be a nice well-behaved family——
(BIRLING: We think we are——

GERALD: So if that's the only obstacle, sir, I think you might as well accept my congratulations now.

BIRLING: No, no, I couldn't do that. And don't say anything yet.

GERALD: Not even to my mother? I know she'd be delighted.

BIRLING: Well, when she comes back, you might drop a hint to her. And you can promise her that we'll try to keep out of trouble during the next few months.

They both laugh. ERIC enters.)

ERIC: What's the joke? Started telling stories?

BIRLING: No. Want another glass of port?

ERIC (*sitting down*): Yes, please. (*Takes decanter and helps himself.*) Mother says we mustn't stay too long. But I don't think it matters. I left 'em talking about clothes again. You'd think a girl had never had any clothes before she gets married. Women are potty about 'em.

BIRLING: Yes, but you've got to remember, my boy, that clothes mean something quite different to a woman. Not just something to wear—and not only something to make 'em look prettier—but—well, a sort of sign or token of their self-respect.

GERALD: That's true.

ERIC (*eagerly*): Yes, I remember—— (*but he checks himself.*)

BIRLING: Well, what do you remember?

ERIC (*confused*): Nothing.

BIRLING: Nothing?

GERALD (*amused*): Sounds a bit fishy to me.

BIRLING (*taking it in same manner*): Yes, you don't know what some of these boys get up to nowadays. More money to spend and time to spare than I had when I was Eric's age. They worked us hard in those days and kept us short of cash. Though even then—we broke out and had a bit of fun sometimes.

GERALD: I'll bet you did.

BIRLING (*solemnly*): But this is the point. I don't want to lecture you two young fellows again. But what so many of you don't seem to understand now, when things are so much easier, is that a man has to make his own way—has to look after himself—and his family too, of course, when he has one—and so long as he does that he won't come to much harm. But the way some of these cranks talk and write now, you'd think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive—community and all that

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nonsense. But take my word for it, you youngsters—and I've learnt in the good hard school of experience—that a man has to mind his own business and look after himself and his own—and—

We hear the sharp ring of a front door bell. BIRLING stops to listen.

ERIC: Somebody at the front door.

BIRLING: Edna'll answer it. Well, have another glass of port, Gerald—and then we'll join the ladies. That'll stop me giving you good advice.

ERIC: Yes, you've piled it on a bit to-night, Father.

BIRLING: Special occasion. And feeling contented, for once, I wanted you to have the benefit of my experience.

EDNA enters.

EDNA: Please, sir, an inspector's called.

BIRLING: An inspector? What kind of inspector?

EDNA: A police inspector. He says his name's Inspector Goole.

BIRLING: Don't know him. Does he want to see me?

EDNA: Yes, sir. He says it's important.

BIRLING: All right, Edna. Show him in here. Give us some more light.

EDNA does, then goes out.

I'm still on the Bench. It may be something about a warrant.

GERALD (*lightly*): Sure to be. Unless Eric's been up to something. (*Nodding confidentially to BIRLING.*) And that would be awkward, wouldn't it?

BIRLING (*humorously*): Very.

ERIC (*who is uneasy, sharply*): Here, what do you mean?

GERALD (*lightly*): Only something we were talking about when you were out. A joke really.

ERIC (*still uneasy*): Well, I don't think it's very funny.

BIRLING (*sharply, staring at him*): What's the matter with you?

ERIC (*defiantly*): Nothing.)

EDNA (*opening door, and announcing*): Inspector Goole.

The INSPECTOR enters, and EDNA goes, closing door after her. The INSPECTOR need not be a big man but he creates at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. He is a man in his fifties, dressed in a plain darkish suit of the period. He speaks carefully, weightily, and has a disconcerting habit of looking hard at the person he addresses before actually speaking.

INSPECTOR: Mr. Birling?

BIRLING: Yes. Sit down, Inspector.

INSPECTOR (*sitting*): Thank you, sir.

BIRLING: Have a glass of port—or a little whisky?

INSPECTOR: No, thank you, Mr. Birling. I'm on duty.

BIRLING: You're new, aren't you?

INSPECTOR: Yes, sir. Only recently transferred.

BIRLING: I thought you must be. I was an alderman for years—and Lord Mayor two years ago—and I'm still on the Bench—so I know the Brumley police officers pretty well—and I thought I'd never seen you before.

INSPECTOR: Quite so.

BIRLING: Well, what can I do for you? Some trouble about a warrant?

INSPECTOR: No, Mr. Birling.

BIRLING (*after a pause, with a touch of impatience*): Well, what is it then?

INSPECTOR: I'd like some information, if you don't mind, Mr. Birling. Two hours ago a young woman died in the Infirmary. She'd been taken there this afternoon because she'd swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant. Burnt her inside out, of course.

ERIC (*involuntarily*): My God!

INSPECTOR: Yes, she was in great agony. They did everything they could for her at the Infirmary, but she died. Suicide of course.

BIRLING (*rather impatiently*): Yes yes. Horrible business. But I don't understand why you should come here, Inspector——

INSPECTOR (*cutting through, massively*): I've been round to the room she had, and she'd left a letter there and a sort of diary. Like a lot of these young women who get into various kinds of trouble, she'd used more than one name. But her original name—her real name—was Eva Smith.

BIRLING (*thoughtfully*): Eva Smith?

INSPECTOR: Do you remember her, Mr. Birling?

BIRLING (*slowly*): No—I seem to remember hearing that name—Eva Smith—somewhere. But it doesn't convey anything to me. And I don't see where I come into this.

INSPECTOR: She was employed in your works at one time.

BIRLING: Oh—that's it, is it? Well, we've several hundred young women there, y'know, and they keep changing.

INSPECTOR: This young woman, Eva Smith, was a bit out of the

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ordinary. I found a photograph of her in her lodgings. Perhaps you'd remember her from that.

INSPECTOR takes a photograph, about postcard size, out of his pocket and goes to BIRLING. Both GERALD and ERIC rise to have a look at the photograph, but the INSPECTOR interposes himself between them and the photograph. They are surprised and rather annoyed. BIRLING stares hard, and with recognition, at the photograph, which the INSPECTOR then replaces in his pocket.

GERALD (*showing annoyance*): Any particular reason why I shouldn't see this girl's photograph, Inspector?

INSPECTOR (*coolly, looking hard at him*): There might be.

ERIC: And the same applies to me, I suppose?

INSPECTOR: Yes

GERALD: I can't imagine what it could be.

ERIC: Neither can I.

BIRLING: And I must say, I agree with them, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: It's the way I like to go to work. One person and one line of enquiry at a time. Otherwise, there's a muddle.

BIRLING: I see. Sensible really. (*Moves restlessly, then turns.*) You've had enough of that port, Eric.

The INSPECTOR is watching BIRLING and now BIRLING notices him.

INSPECTOR: I think you remember Eva Smith now, don't you, Mr. Birling?

BIRLING: Yes, I do. She was one of my employees and then I discharged her.

ERIC: Is that why she committed suicide? When was this, Father?

BIRLING: Just keep quiet, Eric, and don't get excited. This girl left us nearly two years ago. Let me see—it must have been in the early autumn of nineteen-ten.

INSPECTOR: Yes. End of September, nineteen-ten.

BIRLING: That's right.

GERALD: Look here, sir. Wouldn't you rather I was out of this? /

BIRLING: I don't mind your being here, Gerald. And I'm sure you've no objection, have you, Inspector? Perhaps I ought to explain first that this is Mr. Gerald Croft—the son of Sir George Croft—you know, Crofts Limited.

INSPECTOR: Mr. Gerald Croft, eh?

BIRLING: Yes. Incidentally we've been modestly celebrating his engagement to my daughter, Sheila.

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AN INSPECTOR CALLS

INSPECTOR: I see. Mr. Croft is going to marry Miss Sheila Birling?

GERALD (*smiling*): I hope so.

INSPECTOR (*gravely*): Then I'd prefer you to stay.

GERALD (*surprised*): Oh—all right.

BIRLING (*somewhat impatiently*): Look—there's nothing mysterious—or scandalous—about this business—at least not so far as I'm concerned. It's a perfectly straightforward case, and as it happened more than eighteen months ago—nearly two years ago—obviously it has nothing whatever to do with the wretched girl's suicide. Eh, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: No, sir. I can't agree with you there.

BIRLING: Why not?

INSPECTOR: Because what happened to her then may have determined what happened to her afterwards, and what happened to her afterwards may have driven her to suicide. A chain of events.

BIRLING: Oh well—put like that, there's something in what you say. Still, I can't accept any responsibility. If we were all responsible for everything that happened to everybody we'd had anything to do with, it would be very awkward, wouldn't it?

INSPECTOR: Very awkward.

BIRLING: We'd all be in an impossible position, wouldn't we?

ERIC: By Jove, yes. And as you were saying, Dad, a man has to look after himself—

BIRLING: Yes, well, we needn't go into all that.

INSPECTOR: Go into what?

BIRLING: Oh—just before you came—I'd been giving these young men a little good advice. Now—about this girl, Eva Smith. I remember her quite well now. She was a lively good-looking girl—country-bred, I fancy—and she'd been working in one of our machine shops for over a year. A good worker too. In fact, the foreman there told me he was ready to promote her into what we call a leading operator—head of a small group of girls. But after they came back from their holidays that August, they were all rather restless, and they suddenly decided to ask for more money. They were averaging about twenty-two and six, which was neither more nor less than is paid generally in our industry. They wanted the rates raised so that they could average about twenty-five shillings a week. I refused, of course.

INSPECTOR: Why?

BIRLING (*surprised*): Did you say "Why?"?

INSPECTOR: Yes. Why did you refuse?

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BIRLING: Well, Inspector, I don't see that it's any concern of yours how I choose to run my business. Is it now?

INSPECTOR: It might be, you know.

BIRLING: I don't like the tone.

INSPECTOR: I'm sorry. But you asked me a question.

BIRLING: And you asked me a question before that, a quite unnecessary question too.

INSPECTOR: It's my duty to ask questions. †

BIRLING: Well, it's my duty to keep labour costs down, and if I'd agreed to this demand for a new rate we'd have added about twelve per cent to our labour costs. Does that satisfy you? So I refused. Said I couldn't consider it. We were paying the usual rates and if they didn't like those rates, they could go and work somewhere else. It's a free country, I told them.

ERIC: It isn't if you can't go and work somewhere else.

INSPECTOR: Quite so.

BIRLING (*to ERIC*): Look—just you keep out of this. You hadn't even started in the works when this happened. So they went on strike. That didn't last long, of course.

GERALD: Not if it was just after the holidays. They'd be all broke—if I know them.

BIRLING: Right, Gerald. They mostly were. And so was the strike, after a week or two. Pitiful affair. Well, we let them all come back—at the old rates—except the four or five ringleaders, who'd started the trouble. I went down myself and told them to clear out. And this girl, Eva Smith, was one of them. She'd had a lot to say—far too much—so she had to go.

GERALD: You couldn't have done anything else.

ERIC: He could. He could have kept her on instead of throwing her out. I call it tough luck.

BIRLING: Rubbish! If you don't come down sharply on some of these people, they'd soon be asking for the earth.

GERALD: I should say so!

INSPECTOR: They might. But after all it's better to ask for the earth than to take it.

(BIRLING (*staring at the* INSPECTOR): What did you say your name was, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: Goole. G. double O—L—E.

BIRLING: How do you get on with our Chief Constable, Colonel Roberts?

INSPECTOR: I don't see much of him.

BIRLING: Perhaps I ought to warn you that he's an old friend of mine, and that I see him fairly frequently. We play golf together sometimes up at the West Brumley.

INSPECTOR (*dryly*): I don't play golf.

BIRLING: I didn't suppose you did.

ERIC (*bursting out*): Well, I think it's a dam' shame.

INSPECTOR: No, I've never wanted to play.

ERIC: No. I mean about this girl—Eva Smith. Why shouldn't they try for higher wages? We try for the highest possible prices. And I don't see why she should have been sacked just because she'd a bit more spirit than the others. You said yourself she was a good worker. I'd have let her stay.

BIRLING (*rather angrily*): Unless you brighten your ideas, you'll never be in a position to let anybody stay or to tell anybody to go. It's about time you learnt to face a few responsibilities. That's something this public-school-and-Varsity life you've had doesn't seem to teach you.

ERIC (*sulkily*): Well, we don't need to tell the Inspector all about that, do we?

BIRLING: I don't see we need to tell the Inspector anything more. In fact, there's nothing I can tell him. I told the girl to clear out, and she went. That's the last I heard of her. Have you any idea what happened to her after that? Get into trouble? Go on the streets?

INSPECTOR (*rather slowly*): No, she didn't exactly go on the streets.

SHEILA *has now entered*.

SHEILA (*gaily*): What's this about streets? (*Noticing the INSPECTOR.*) Oh—sorry. I didn't know. Mummy sent me in to ask you why you didn't come along to the drawing-room.

BIRLING: We shall be along in a minute now. Just finishing.

INSPECTOR: I'm afraid not.

BIRLING (*abruptly*): There's nothing else, y'know. I've just told you that.

SHEILA: What's all this about?

BIRLING: Nothing to do with you, Sheila. Run along.

INSPECTOR: No, wait a minute, Miss Birling.

BIRLING (*angrily*): Look here, Inspector, I consider this uncalled-for and officious. I've half a mind to report you. I've told you all I know—and it doesn't seem to me very important—and now there isn't the slightest reason why my daughter should be dragged into this unpleasant business.

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SHEILA (*coming further in*): What business? What's happening?

INSPECTOR (*impressively*): I'm a police inspector, Miss Birling. This afternoon a young woman drank some disinfectant, and died, after several hours of agony, to-night in the Infirmary.

SHEILA: Oh—how horrible! Was it an accident?

INSPECTOR: No. She wanted to end her life. She felt she couldn't go on any longer.

BIRLING: Well, don't tell me that's because I discharged her from my employment nearly two years ago.

ERIC: That might have started it.

SHEILA: Did you, Dad?

BIRLING: Yes. The girl had been causing trouble in the works. I was quite justified.

GERALD: Yes, I think you were. I know we'd have done the same thing. Don't look like that, Sheila.

SHEILA (*rather distressed*): Sorry! It's just that I can't help thinking about this girl—destroying herself so horribly—and I've been so happy to-night. Oh I wish you hadn't told me. What was she like? Quite young?

INSPECTOR: Yes. Twenty-four.

SHEILA: Pretty?

INSPECTOR: She wasn't pretty when I saw her to-day, but she had been pretty—very pretty.

BIRLING: That's enough of that.

GERALD: And I don't really see that this enquiry gets you anywhere, Inspector. It's what happened to her since she left Mr. Birling's works that is important.

BIRLING: Obviously. I suggested that some time ago.

GERALD: And we can't help you there because we don't know.

INSPECTOR (*slowly*): Are you sure you don't know?

He looks at GERALD, then at ERIC, then at SHEILA.

BIRLING: And are you suggesting now that one of them knows something about this girl?

INSPECTOR: Yes.

BIRLING: You didn't come here just to see me then?

INSPECTOR: No.

The other four exchange bewildered and perturbed glances.

BIRLING (*with marked change of tone*): Well, of course, if I'd known that earlier, I wouldn't have called you officious and talked about

reporting you. You understand that, don't you, Inspector? I thought that—for some reason best known to yourself—you were making the most of this tiny bit of information I could give you. I'm sorry. This makes a difference. You sure of your facts?

INSPECTOR: Some of them—yes.

BIRLING: I can't think they can be of any great consequence.

INSPECTOR: The girl's dead though.

SHEILA: What do you mean by saying that? You talk as if we were responsible——

BIRLING (*cutting in*): Just a minute, Sheila. Now, Inspector, perhaps you and I had better go and talk this over quietly in a corner——

SHEILA (*cutting in*): Why should you? He's finished with you. He says it's one of us now.

BIRLING: Yes, and I'm trying to settle it sensibly for you.

GERALD: Well, there's nothing to settle as far as I'm concerned. I've never known an Eva Smith.

ERIC: Neither have I.

SHEILA: Was that her name? Eva Smith?

GERALD: Yes.

SHEILA: Never heard it before.

GERALD: So where are you now, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: Where I was before, Mr. Croft. I told you—that like a lot of these young women, she'd used more than one name. She was still Eva Smith when Mr. Birling sacked her—for wanting twenty-five shillings a week instead of twenty-two and six. But after that she stopped being Eva Smith. Perhaps she'd had enough of it.

ERIC: Can't blame her.

SHEILA (*to BIRLING*): I think it was a mean thing to do. Perhaps that spoilt everything for her.

BIRLING: Rubbish! (*To INSPECTOR.*) Do you know what happened to this girl after she left my works?

INSPECTOR: Yes. She was out of work for the next two months. Both her parents were dead, so that she'd no home to go back to. And she hadn't been able to save much out of what Birling and Company had paid her. So that after two months, with no work, no money coming in, and living in lodgings, with no relatives to help her, few friends, lonely, half-starved, she was feeling desperate.

SHEILA (*warmly*): I should think so. It's a rotten shame.

INSPECTOR: There are a lot of young women living that sort of existence in every city and big town in this country, Miss Birling. If

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there weren't, the factories and warehouses wouldn't know where to look for cheap labour. Ask your father.

SHEILA: But these girls aren't cheap labour—they're *people*.

INSPECTOR (*dryly*): I've had that notion myself from time to time. In fact, I've thought that it would do us all a bit of good if sometimes we tried to put ourselves in the place of these young women counting their pennies in their dingy little back bedrooms.

SHEILA: Yes, I expect it would. But what happened to her then?

INSPECTOR: She had what seemed to her a wonderful stroke of luck. She was taken on in a shop—and a good shop too—Milwards.

SHEILA: Milwards! We go there—in fact, I was there this afternoon—— (*archly to GERALD*) for *your* benefit.

GERALD (*smiling*): Good!

SHEILA: Yes, she was lucky to get taken on at Milwards.

INSPECTOR: That's what she thought. And it happened that at the beginning of December that year—nineteen-ten—there was a good deal of influenza about, and Milwards suddenly found themselves short-handed. So that gave her her chance. It seems she liked working there. It was a nice change from a factory. She enjoyed being among pretty clothes, I've no doubt. And now she felt she was making a good fresh start. You can imagine how she felt.

SHEILA: Yes, of course.

BIRLING: And then she got herself into trouble there, I suppose?

INSPECTOR: After about a couple of months, just when she felt she was settling down nicely, they told her she'd have to go.

BIRLING: Not doing her work properly?

INSPECTOR: There was nothing wrong with the way she was doing her work. They admitted that.

BIRLING: There must have been something wrong.

INSPECTOR: All she knew was—that a customer complained about her—and so she had to go.

SHEILA (*staring at him, agitated*): When was this?

INSPECTOR (*impressively*): At the end of January—last year.

SHEILA: What—what did this girl look like?

INSPECTOR: If you'll come over here, I'll show you.

He moves nearer a light—perhaps standard lamp—and she crosses to him. He produces the photograph. She looks at it closely, recognises it with a little cry, gives a half-stifled sob, and then runs out. The INSPECTOR puts the photograph back into his pocket and

stares speculatively after her. The other three stare in amazement for a moment.

BIRLING: What's the matter with her?

ERIC: She recognised her from the photograph, didn't she?

INSPECTOR: Yes.

BIRLING (*angrily*): Why the devil do you want to go upsetting the child like that?

INSPECTOR: I didn't do it. She's upsetting herself.

BIRLING: Well—why—why?

INSPECTOR: I don't know—yet. That's something I have to find out.

BIRLING (*still angrily*): Well—if you don't mind—I'll find out first.

GERALD: Shall I go to her?

BIRLING (*moving*): No, leave this to me. I must also have a word with my wife—tell her what's happening. (*Turns at door, staring at INSPECTOR angrily.*) We were having a nice little family celebration to-night. And a nasty mess you've made of it now, haven't you?

INSPECTOR (*steadily*): That's more or less what I was thinking earlier to-night, when I was in the Infirmary looking at what was left of Eva Smith. A nice little promising life there, I thought, and a nasty mess somebody's made of it.

BIRLING looks as if about to make some retort, then thinks better of it, and goes out, closing door sharply behind him. GERALD and ERIC exchange uneasy glances. The INSPECTOR ignores them.

GERALD: I'd like to have a look at that photograph now, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: All in good time.

GERALD: I don't see why——

INSPECTOR (*cutting in, massively*): You heard what I said before, Mr. Croft. One line of enquiry at a time. Otherwise we'll all be talking at once and won't know where we are. If you've anything to tell me, you'll have an opportunity of doing it soon.

GERALD (*rather uneasily*): Well, I don't suppose I have——

ERIC (*suddenly bursting out*): Look here, I've had enough of this.

INSPECTOR (*dryly*): I dare say.

ERIC (*uneasily*): I'm sorry—but you see—we were having a little party—and I've had a few drinks, including rather a lot of champagne—and I've got a headache—and as I'm only in the way here—I think I'd better turn in.

INSPECTOR: And I think you'd better stay here.

ERIC: Why should I?

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INSPECTOR: It might be less trouble. If you turn in, you might have to turn out again soon.

GERALD: Getting a bit heavy-handed, aren't you, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: Possibly. But if you're easy with me, I'm easy with you.

GERALD: After all, y'know, we're respectable citizens and not criminals.

INSPECTOR: Sometimes there isn't as much difference as you think. Often, if it was left to me, I wouldn't know where to draw the line.

GERALD: Fortunately, it isn't left to you, is it?

INSPECTOR: No, it isn't. But some things are left to me. Enquiries of this sort, for instance. (*Enter SHEILA, who looks as if she's been crying.*) Well, Miss Birling?

SHEILA (*coming in, closing door*): You knew it was me all the time, didn't you?

INSPECTOR: I had an idea it might be—from something the girl herself wrote.

SHEILA: I've told my father—he didn't seem to think it amounted to much—but I felt rotten about it at the time and now I feel a lot worse. Did it make much difference to her? *

INSPECTOR: Yes, I'm afraid it did. It was the last real steady job she had. When she lost it—for no reason that she could discover—she decided she might as well try another kind of life.

SHEILA (*miserably*): So I'm really responsible?

INSPECTOR: No, not entirely. A good deal happened to her after that. But you're partly to blame. Just as your father is.

ERIC: But what did Sheila do?

SHEILA (*distressed*): I went to the manager at Milwards and I told him that if they didn't get rid of that girl, I'd never go near the place again and I'd persuade mother to close our account with them.

INSPECTOR: And why did you do that?

SHEILA: Because I was in a furious temper.

INSPECTOR: And what had this girl done to make you lose your temper?

SHEILA: When I was looking at myself in the mirror I caught sight of her smiling at the assistant, and I was furious with her. I'd been in a bad temper anyhow.

INSPECTOR: And was it the girl's fault?

SHEILA: No, not really. It was my own fault. (*Suddenly, to GERALD*) All right, Gerald, you needn't look at me like that. At least, I'm

trying to tell the truth. I expect you've done things you're ashamed of too.

GERALD (*surprised*): Well, I never said I hadn't. I don't see why——

INSPECTOR (*cutting in*): Never mind about that. You can settle that between you afterwards. (*To SHEILA.*) What happened?

SHEILA: I'd gone in to try something on. It was an idea of my own—mother had been against it, and so had the assistant—but I insisted. As soon as I tried it on, I knew they'd been right. It just didn't suit me at all. I looked silly in the thing. Well, this girl had brought the dress up from the workroom, and when the assistant—Miss Francis—had asked her something about it, this girl, to show us what she meant, had held the dress up, as if she was wearing it. And it just suited her. She was the right type for it, just as I was the wrong type. She was a very pretty girl too—with big dark eyes—and that didn't make it any better. Well, when I tried the thing on and looked at myself and knew that it was all wrong, I caught sight of this girl smiling at Miss Francis—as if to say: "Doesn't she look awful"—and I was absolutely furious. I was very rude to both of them, and then I went to the manager and told him that this girl had been very impertinent—and—and—— (*She almost breaks down, but just controls herself.*) How could I know what would happen afterwards? If she'd been some miserable plain little creature, I don't suppose I'd have done it. But she was very pretty and looked as if she could take care of herself. I couldn't be sorry for her.

INSPECTOR: In fact, in a kind of way, you might be said to have been jealous of her.

SHEILA: Yes, I suppose so.

INSPECTOR: And so you used the power you had, as a daughter of a good customer and also of a man well-known in the town, to punish the girl just because she made you feel like that?

SHEILA: Yes, but it didn't seem to be anything very terrible at the time. Don't you understand? And if I could help her now, I would——

INSPECTOR (*harshly*): Yes, but you can't. It's too late. She's dead.

ERIC: My God, it's a bit thick, when you come to think of it——

SHEILA (*stormily*): Oh shut up, Eric. I know, I know. It's the only time I've ever done anything like that, and I'll never, never do it again to anybody. I've noticed them giving me a sort of look sometimes at Milwards—I noticed it even this afternoon—and I suppose some of them remember. I feel now I can never go there again. Oh—why had this to happen?

INSPECTOR (*sternly*): That's what I asked myself to-night when I

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was looking at that dead girl. And then I said to myself: "Well, we'll try to understand why it had to happen." And that's why I'm here, and why I'm not going until I know *all* that happened. Eva Smith lost her job with Birling and Company because the strike failed and they were determined not to have another one. At last she found another job—under what name I don't know—in a big shop, and had to leave there because you were annoyed with yourself and passed the annoyance on to her. Now she had to try something else. So first she changed her name to Daisy Renton——

GERALD (*startled*): What?

INSPECTOR (*steadily*): I said she changed her name to Daisy Renton.

GERALD (*pulling himself together*): D'you mind if I give myself a drink, Sheila?

SHEILA *merely nods, still staring at him, and he goes across to the tantalus on the sideboard for a whisky.*

INSPECTOR: Where is your father, Miss Birling?

SHEILA: He went into the drawing-room, to tell my mother what was happening here. Eric, take the Inspector along to the drawing-room. (*As ERIC moves, the INSPECTOR looks from SHEILA to GERALD, then goes out with ERIC.*) Well, Gerald?

GERALD (*trying to smile*): Well what, Sheila?

SHEILA: How did you come to know this girl—Eva Smith?

GERALD: I didn't.

SHEILA: Daisy Renton then—it's the same thing.

GERALD: Why should I have known her?

SHEILA: Oh don't be stupid. We haven't much time. You gave yourself away as soon as he mentioned her other name.

GERALD: All right. I knew her. Let's leave it at that.

SHEILA: We can't leave it at that.

GERALD (*approaching her*): Now listen, darling——

SHEILA: No, that's no use. You not only knew her but you knew her very well. Otherwise, you wouldn't look so guilty about it. When did you first get to know her? (*He does not reply.*) Was it after she left Milwards? When she changed her name, as he said, and began to lead a different sort of life? Were you seeing her last spring and summer, during that time when you hardly came near me and said you were so busy? Were you? (*He does not reply but looks at her.*) Yes, of course you were.

GERALD: I'm sorry, Sheila. But it was all over and done with, last summer. I hadn't set eyes on the girl for at least six months. I don't come into this suicide business.

ACT I

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

SHEILA: I thought I didn't, half an hour ago.

GERALD: You don't. Neither of us does. So—for God's sake—don't say anything to the Inspector.

SHEILA: About you and this girl?

GERALD: Yes. We can keep it from him.

SHEILA (*laughs rather hysterically*): Why—you fool—he knows. Of course he knows. And I hate to think how much he knows that we don't know yet. You'll see. You'll see.

She looks at him almost in triumph. He looks crushed. The door slowly opens and the INSPECTOR appears, looking steadily and searchingly at them.

INSPECTOR: Well?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

At rise, scene and situation are exactly as they were at end of Act I.

The INSPECTOR remains at the door for a few moments looking at SHEILA and GERALD. Then he comes forward, leaving door open behind him.

INSPECTOR (*to GERALD*): Well?

SHEILA (*with hysterical laugh, to GERALD*): You see? What did I tell you?

INSPECTOR: What did you tell him?

GERALD (*with an effort*): Inspector, I think Miss Birling ought to be excused any more of this questioning. She's nothing more to tell you. She's had a long, exciting and tiring day—we were celebrating our engagement, you know—and now she's obviously had about as much as she can stand. You heard her.

SHEILA: He means that I'm getting hysterical now.

INSPECTOR: And are you?

SHEILA: Probably.

INSPECTOR: Well, I don't want to keep you here. I've no more questions to ask you.

SHEILA: No, but you haven't finished asking questions—have you?

INSPECTOR: No.

SHEILA (*to GERALD*): You see? (*To INSPECTOR.*) Then I'm staying.

GERALD: Why should you? It's bound to be unpleasant and disturbing.

INSPECTOR: And you think young women ought to be protected against unpleasant and disturbing things?

GERALD: If possible—yes.

INSPECTOR: Well, we know one young woman who wasn't, don't we?

GERALD: I suppose I asked for that.

SHEILA: Be careful you don't ask for any more, Gerald.

GERALD: I only meant to say to you—— Why stay when you'll hate it?

SHEILA: It can't be any worse for me than it has been. And it might be better.

GERALD (*bitterly*): I see.

SHEILA: What do you see?

GERALD: You've been through it—and now you want to see somebody else put through it.

SHEILA (*bitterly*): So that's what you think I'm really like. I'm glad I realised it in time, Gerald.

GERALD: No, no, I didn't mean——

SHEILA (*cutting in*): Yes, you did. And if you'd really loved me, you couldn't have said that. You listened to that nice story about me. I got that girl sacked from Milwards. And now you've made up your mind I must obviously be a selfish, vindictive creature.

GERALD: I neither said that nor even suggested it.

SHEILA: Then why say I want to see somebody else put through it? That's not what I meant at all.

GERALD: All right then, I'm sorry.

SHEILA: Yes, but you don't believe me. And this is just the wrong time not to believe me.

INSPECTOR (*massively taking charge*): Allow me, Miss Birling. (To GERALD.) I can tell you why Miss Birling wants to stay on and why she says it might be better for her if she did. A girl died to-night. A pretty, lively sort of girl, who never did anybody no harm. But she died in misery and agony—hating life——

SHEILA (*distressed*): Don't please—I know, I know—and I can't stop thinking about it——

INSPECTOR (*ignoring this*): Now Miss Birling has just been made to understand what she did to this girl. She feels responsible. And if she leaves us now, and doesn't hear any more, then she'll feel she's entirely to blame, she'll be alone with her responsibility, the rest of to-night, all to-morrow, all the next night——

SHEILA (*eagerly*): Yes, that's it. And I know I'm to blame—and I'm desperately sorry—but I can't believe—I won't believe—it's simply my fault that in the end she—she committed suicide. That would be too horrible——

INSPECTOR (*sternly to them both*): You see, we have to share something. If there's nothing else, we'll have to share our guilt.

SHEILA (*staring at him*): Yes. That's true. You know. (*She goes closer to him, wonderingly.*) I don't understand about you.

INSPECTOR (*calmly*): There's no reason why you should.

He regards her calmly while she stares at him wonderingly and dubiously. Now MRS. BIRLING enters, briskly and self-confidently,

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quite out of key with the little scene that has just passed. SHEILA feels this at once.

MRS. BIRLING (*smiling, social*): Good evening, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: Good evening, madam.

MRS. BIRLING (*same easy tone*): I'm Mrs. Birling, y'know. My husband has just explained why you're here, and while we'll be glad to tell you anything you want to know, I don't think we can help you much.

SHEILA: No, Mother—please!

MRS. BIRLING (*affecting great surprise*): What's the matter, Sheila?

SHEILA (*hesitantly*): I know it sounds silly—

MRS. BIRLING: What does?

SHEILA: You see, I feel you're beginning all wrong. And I'm afraid you'll say something or do something that you'll be sorry for afterwards.

MRS. BIRLING: I don't know what you're talking about, Sheila.

SHEILA: We all started like that—so confident, so pleased with ourselves until he began asking us questions.

MRS. BIRLING *looks from SHEILA to the INSPECTOR*.

MRS. BIRLING: You seem to have made a great impression on this child, Inspector.

INSPECTOR (*coolly*): We often do on the young ones. They're more impressionable.

He and MRS. BIRLING look at each other for a moment. Then

MRS. BIRLING turns to SHEILA again.

MRS. BIRLING: You're looking tired, dear. I think you ought to go to bed—and forget about this absurd business. You'll feel better in the morning.

SHEILA: Mother, I couldn't possibly go. Nothing could be worse for me. We've settled all that. I'm staying here until I know why that girl killed herself.

MRS. BIRLING: Nothing but morbid curiosity.

SHEILA: No it isn't.

MRS. BIRLING: Please don't contradict me like that. And in any case I don't suppose for a moment that we can understand why the girl committed suicide. Girls of that class—

SHEILA (*urgently, cutting in*): Mother, don't—please don't. For your own sake, as well as ours, you mustn't—

MRS. BIRLING (*annoyed*): Mustn't—what? Really, Sheila!

SHEILA (*slowly, carefully now*): You mustn't try to build up a kind

of wall between us and that girl. If you do, then the Inspector will just break it down. And it'll be all the worse when he does.

MRS. BIRLING: I don't understand you. (*To INSPECTOR.*) Do you?

INSPECTOR: Yes. And she's right.

MRS. BIRLING (*haughtily*): I beg your pardon!

INSPECTOR (*very plainly*): I said Yes—I do understand her. And she's right.

MRS. BIRLING: That—I consider—is a trifle impertinent, Inspector. (*SHEILA gives short hysterical laugh.*) Now, what is it, Sheila?

SHEILA: I don't know. Perhaps it's because *impertinent* is such a silly word.

MRS. BIRLING: In any case . . .

SHEILA: But, Mother, do stop before it's too late.

MRS. BIRLING: If you mean that the Inspector will take offence——

INSPECTOR (*cutting in, calmly*): No, no. I never take offence.

MRS. BIRLING: I'm glad to hear it. Though I must add that it seems to me that we have more reason for taking offence.

INSPECTOR: Let's leave *offence* out of it, shall we?

GERALD: I think we'd better.

SHEILA: So do I.

MRS. BIRLING (*rebuking them*): I'm talking to the Inspector now, if you don't mind. (*To INSPECTOR, rather grandly.*) I realise that you may have to conduct some sort of enquiry, but I must say that so far you seem to be conducting it in a rather peculiar and offensive manner. You know of course that my husband was Lord Mayor only two years ago and that he's still a magistrate——

GERALD (*cutting in, rather impatiently*): Mrs. Birling, the Inspector knows all that. And I don't think it's a very good idea to remind him——

SHEILA (*cutting in*): It's crazy. Stop it, please, Mother.

INSPECTOR (*imperturbable*): Yes. Now what about Mr. Birling?

MRS. BIRLING: He's coming back in a moment. He's just talking to my son, Eric, who seems to be in an excitable silly mood.

INSPECTOR: What's the matter with him?

MRS. BIRLING: Eric? Oh—I'm afraid he may have had rather too much to drink to-night. We were having a little celebration here——

INSPECTOR (*cutting in*): Isn't he used to drinking?

MRS. BIRLING: No, of course not. He's only a boy.

INSPECTOR: No, he's a young man. And some young men drink far too much.

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SHEILA: And Eric's one of them.

MRS. BIRLING (*very sharply*): Sheila!

SHEILA (*urgently*): I don't want to get poor Eric into trouble. He's probably in enough trouble already. But we really must stop these silly pretences. This isn't the time to pretend that Eric isn't used to drink. He's been steadily drinking too much for the last two years.

MRS. BIRLING (*staggered*): It isn't true. You know him, Gerald—and you're a man—you must know it isn't true.

INSPECTOR (*as GERALD hesitates*): Well, Mr. Croft?

GERALD (*apologetically, to MRS. BIRLING*): I'm afraid it is, y'know. Actually I've never seen much of him outside this house—but—well, I have gathered that he does drink pretty hard.

MRS. BIRLING (*bitterly*): And this is the time you choose to tell me.

SHEILA: Yes, of course it is. That's what I meant when I talked about building up a wall that's sure to be knocked flat. It makes it all the harder to bear.

MRS. BIRLING: But it's you—and not the Inspector here—who's doing it—

SHEILA: Yes, but don't you see? *He hasn't started on you yet.*

MRS. BIRLING (*after pause, recovering herself*): If necessary I shall be glad to answer any questions the Inspector wishes to ask me. Though naturally I don't know anything about this girl.

INSPECTOR (*gravely*): We'll see, Mrs. Birling.

Enter BIRLING, who closes door behind him.

BIRLING (*rather hot, bothered*): I've been trying to persuade Eric to go to bed, but he won't. Now he says you told him to stay up. Did you?

INSPECTOR: Yes, I did.

BIRLING: Why?

INSPECTOR: Because I shall want to talk to him, Mr. Birling.

BIRLING: I can't see why you should, but if you must, then I suggest you do it now. Have him in and get it over, then let the lad go.

INSPECTOR: No, I can't do that yet. I'm sorry, but he'll have to wait.

BIRLING: Now look here, Inspector—

INSPECTOR (*cutting in, with authority*): He must wait his turn.

SHEILA (*to MRS. BIRLING*): You see?

MRS. BIRLING: No, I don't. And please be quiet, Sheila.

BIRLING (*angrily*): Inspector, I've told you before, I don't like your

tone nor the way you're handling this enquiry. And I don't propose to give you much more rope.

INSPECTOR: You needn't give me any rope.

SHEILA (*rather wildly, with laugh*): No, he's giving us rope—so that we'll hang ourselves.

BIRLING (*to MRS. BIRLING*): What's the matter with that child?

MRS. BIRLING: Over-excited. And she refused to go. (*With sudden anger, to INSPECTOR.*) Well, come along—what is it you want to know?

INSPECTOR (*coolly*): At the end of January, last year, this girl Eva Smith had to leave Milwards, because Miss Birling compelled them to discharge her, and then she stopped being Eva Smith, **looking** for a job, and became Daisy Renton, with other ideas. (*Sharply turning on him.*) Mr. Croft, when did you first get to know her?

An exclamation of surprise from BIRLING and MRS. BIRLING.

GERALD: Where did you get the idea that I did know her?

SHEILA: It's no use, Gerald. You're wasting time.

INSPECTOR: As soon as I mentioned the name Daisy Renton, it was obvious you'd known her. You gave yourself away at once.

SHEILA (*bitterly*): Of course he did.

INSPECTOR: And anyhow I knew already. When and where did you first meet her?

GERALD: All right, if you must have it. I met her first, sometime in March last year, in the stalls bar at the Palace. I mean the Palace music hall here in Brumley——

SHEILA: Well, we didn't think you meant Buckingham Palace.

GERALD (*to SHEILA*): Thanks. You're going to be a great help, I can see. You've said your piece, and you're obviously going to hate this, so why **on** earth don't you leave us to it?

SHEILA: Nothing would induce me. I want to understand exactly what happens when a man says he's so busy at the works that he can hardly ever find time to come and see the girl he's supposed to be in love with. I wouldn't miss it for worlds——

INSPECTOR (*with authority*): Yes, Mr. Croft—in the stalls bar at the Palace Variety Theatre . . .

GERALD: I happened to look in, one night, after a rather long dull day, and as the show wasn't very bright, I went down into the bar for a drink. It's a favourite haunt of women of the town——

MRS. BIRLING: Women of the town?

BIRLING: Yes, yes. But I see no point in mentioning the subject—especially—— (*indicating SHEILA.*)

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MRS. BIRLING: It would be much better if Sheila didn't listen to this story at all.

SHEILA: But you're forgetting I'm supposed to be engaged to the hero of it. Go on, Gerald. You went down into the bar, which is a favourite haunt of women of the town.

GERALD: I'm glad I amuse you——

INSPECTOR (*sharply*): Come along, Mr. Croft. What happened?

GERALD: I didn't propose to stay long down there. I hate those hard-eyed dough-faced women. But then I noticed a girl who looked quite different. She was very pretty—soft brown hair and big dark eyes—— (*breaks off*) My God!

INSPECTOR: What's the matter? †

GERALD (*distressed*): Sorry—I—well, I've suddenly realised—taken it in properly—that she's dead——

INSPECTOR (*harshly*): Yes, she's dead.

SHEILA: And probably between us we killed her.

MRS. BIRLING (*sharply*): Sheila, don't talk nonsense.

SHEILA: You wait, Mother.

INSPECTOR (*to GERALD*): Go on.

GERALD: She looked young and fresh and charming and altogether out of place down there. And obviously she wasn't enjoying herself. Old Joe Meggarty, half-drunk and goggle-eyed, had wedged her into a corner with that obscene fat carcass of his——

MRS. BIRLING (*cutting in*): There's no need to be disgusting. And surely you don't mean Alderman Meggarty?

GERALD: Of course I do. He's a notorious womaniser as well as being one of the worst sots and rogues in Brumley——

INSPECTOR: Quite right.

MRS. BIRLING (*staggered*): Well, really! Alderman Meggarty! I must say, we *are* learning something to-night.

SHEILA (*coolly*): Of course we are. But everybody knows about that horrible old Meggarty. A girl I know had to see him at the Town Hall one afternoon and she only escaped with a torn blouse——

BIRLING (*sharply, shocked*): Sheila!

INSPECTOR (*to GERALD*): Go on, please.

GERALD: The girl saw me looking at her and then gave me a glance that was nothing less than a cry for help. So I went across and told Joe Meggarty some nonsense—that the manager had a message for him or something like that—got him out of the way—and then told

the girl that if she didn't want any more of that sort of thing, she'd better let me take her out of there. She agreed at once.

INSPECTOR: Where did you go?

GERALD: We went along to the County Hotel, which I knew would be quiet at that time of night, and we had a drink or two and talked.

INSPECTOR: Did she drink much at that time?

GERALD: No. She only had a port and lemonade—or some such concoction. All she wanted was to talk—a little friendliness—and I gathered that Joe Meggarty's advances had left her rather shaken—as well they might——

INSPECTOR: She talked about herself?

GERALD: Yes. I asked her questions about herself. She told me her name was Daisy Renton, that she'd lost both parents, that she came originally from somewhere outside Brumley. She also told me she'd had a job in one of the works here and had had to leave after a strike. She said something about the shop too, but wouldn't say which it was, and she was deliberately vague about what happened. I couldn't get any exact details from her about her past life. She wanted to talk about herself—just because she felt I was interested and friendly—but at the same time she wanted to be Daisy Renton—and not Eva Smith. In fact, I heard that name for the first time to-night. What she did let slip—though she didn't mean to—was that she was desperately hard up and at that moment was actually hungry. I made the people at the County find some food for her.

INSPECTOR: And then you decided to keep her—as your mistress?

MRS. BIRLING: What?

SHEILA: Of course, Mother. It was obvious from the start. Go on, Gerald. Don't mind Mother.

GERALD (*steadily*): I discovered, not that night but two nights later, when we met again—not accidentally this time of course—that in fact she hadn't a penny and was going to be turned out of the miserable back room she had. It happened that a friend of mine, Charlie Brunswick, had gone off to Canada for six months and had let me have the key of a nice little set of rooms he had—in Morgan Terrace—and had asked me to keep an eye on them for him and use them if I wanted to. So I insisted on Daisy moving into those rooms and I made her take some money to keep her going there. (*Carefully, to the INSPECTOR*) I want you to understand that I didn't install her there so that I could make love to her. I made her go to Morgan Terrace because I was sorry for her, and didn't like the idea of her going back to the Palace bar. I didn't ask for anything in return.

INSPECTOR: I see.

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SHEILA: Yes, but why are you saying that to him? You ought to be saying it to me.

GERALD: I suppose I ought really. I'm sorry, Sheila. Somehow I——

SHEILA (*cutting in, as he hesitates*): I know. Somehow he makes you.

INSPECTOR: But she became your mistress?

GERALD: Yes. I suppose it was inevitable. She was young and pretty and warm-hearted—and intensely grateful. I became at once the most important person in her life—you understand?

INSPECTOR: Yes. She was a woman. She was lonely. Were you in love with her?

SHEILA: Just what I was going to ask?

BIRLING (*angrily*): I really must protest——

INSPECTOR (*turning on him sharply*): Why should you do any protesting? It was you who turned the girl out in the first place.

BIRLING (*rather taken aback*): Well, I only did what any employer might have done. And what I was going to say was that I protest against the way in which my daughter, a young unmarried girl, is being dragged into this——

INSPECTOR (*sharply*): Your daughter isn't living on the moon. She's here in Brumley too.

SHEILA: Yes, and it was I who had the girl turned out of her job at Milwards. And I'm supposed to be engaged to Gerald. And I'm not a child, don't forget. I've a right to know. Were you in love with her, Gerald?

GERALD (*hesitatingly*): It's hard to say. I didn't feel about her as she felt about me.

SHEILA (*with sharp sarcasm*): Of course not. You were the wonderful Fairy Prince. You must have adored it, Gerald.

GERALD: All right—I did for a time. Nearly any man would have done.

SHEILA: That's probably about the best thing you've said to-night. At least it's honest. Did you go and see her every night?

GERALD: No. I wasn't telling you a complete lie when I said I'd been very busy at the works all that time. We were very busy. But of course I did see a good deal of her.

MRS. BIRLING: I don't think we want any further details of this disgusting affair——

SHEILA (*cutting in*): I do. And, anyhow, we haven't had any details yet.

GERALD: And you're not going to have any. (*To MRS. BIRLING.*) You know, it wasn't disgusting.

MRS. BIRLING: It's disgusting to me.

SHEILA: Yes, but after all, you didn't come into this, did you, Mother?

GERALD: Is there anything else you want to know—that you ought to know?

INSPECTOR: Yes. When did this affair end?

GERALD: I can tell you exactly. In the first week of September. I had to go away for several weeks then—on business—and by that time Daisy knew it was coming to an end. So I broke it off definitely before I went.

INSPECTOR: How did she take it?

GERALD: Better than I'd hoped. She was—very gallant—about it.

SHEILA (*with irony*): That was nice for you. '

GERALD: No, it wasn't. (*He waits a moment, then in low, troubled tone.*) She told me she'd been happier than she'd ever been before—but that she knew it couldn't last—hadn't expected it to last. She didn't blame me at all. I wish to God she had now. Perhaps I'd feel better about it.

INSPECTOR: She had to move out of those rooms?

GERALD: Yes, we'd agreed about that. She'd saved a little money during the summer—she'd lived very economically on what I'd allowed her—and didn't want to take any more from me. but I insisted on a parting gift of enough money—though it wasn't so very much—to see her through to the end of the year.

INSPECTOR: Did she tell you what she proposed to do after you'd left her?

GERALD: No. She refused to talk about that. I got the idea, once or twice from what she said, that she thought of leaving Brumley. Whether she did or not—I don't know. Did she?

INSPECTOR: Yes. She went away for about two months. To some seaside place.

GERALD: By herself?

INSPECTOR: Yes. I think she went away—to be alone, to be quiet, to remember all that had happened between you.

GERALD: How do you know that?

INSPECTOR: She kept a rough sort of diary. And she said there that she had to go away and be quiet and remember "just to make it last longer". She felt there'd never be anything as good again for her—so she had to make it last longer.

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GERALD (*gravely*): I see. Well, I never saw her again, and that's all I can tell you.

INSPECTOR: It's all I want to know from you.

GERALD: In that case—as I'm rather more—upset—by this business than I probably appear to be—and—well, I'd like to be alone for a little while—I'd be glad if you'd let me go.

INSPECTOR: Go where? Home?

GERALD: No. I'll just go out—walk about—for a while, if you don't mind. I'll come back.

INSPECTOR: All right, Mr. Croft.

SHEILA: But just in case you forget—or decide not to come back, Gerald, I think you'd better take this with you. (*She hands him the ring.*)

GERALD: I see. Well, I was expecting this.

SHEILA: I don't dislike you as I did half an hour ago, Gerald. In fact, in some odd way, I rather respect you more than I've ever done before. I knew anyhow you were lying about those months last year when you hardly came near me. I knew there was something fishy about that time. And now at least you've been honest. And I believe what you told us about the way you helped her at first. Just out of pity. And it was my fault really that she was so desperate when you first met her. But this has made a difference. You and I aren't the same people who sat down to dinner here. We'd have to start all over again, getting to know each other——

BIRLING: Now, Sheila, I'm not defending him. But you must understand that a lot of young men——

SHEILA: Don't interfere, please, Father. Gerald knows what I mean, and you apparently don't.

GERALD: Yes, I know what you mean. But I'm coming back—if I may.

SHEILA: All right.

MRS. BIRLING: Well, really, I don't know. I think we've just about come to an end of this wretched business——

GERALD: I don't think so. Excuse me.

He goes out. They watch him go in silence. We hear the front door slam.

SHEILA (*to* INSPECTOR): You know, you never showed him that photograph of her.

INSPECTOR: No. It wasn't necessary. And I thought it better not to.

MRS. BIRLING: You have a photograph of this girl?

INSPECTOR: Yes. I think you'd better look at it.

MRS. BIRLING: I don't see any particular reason why I should——

INSPECTOR: Probably not. But you'd better look at it.

MRS. BIRLING: Very well. (*He produces the photograph and she looks hard at it.*)

INSPECTOR (*taking back the photograph*): You recognise her?

MRS. BIRLING: No. Why should I?

INSPECTOR: Of course she might have changed lately, but I can't believe she could have changed so much.

MRS. BIRLING: I don't understand you, Inspector.

INSPECTOR: You mean you don't choose to do, Mrs. Birling.

MRS. BIRLING (*angrily*): I meant what I said.

INSPECTOR: You're not telling me the truth.

MRS. BIRLING: I beg your pardon!

BIRLING (*angrily, to INSPECTOR*): Look here, I'm not going to have this, Inspector. You'll apologise at once.

INSPECTOR: Apologise for what—doing my duty? †

BIRLING: No, for being so offensive about it. I'm a public man——

INSPECTOR (*massively*): Public men, Mr. Birling, have responsibilities as well as privileges.

BIRLING: Possibly. But you weren't asked to come here to talk to me about my responsibilities.

SHEILA: Let's hope not. Though I'm beginning to wonder.

MRS. BIRLING: Does that mean anything, Sheila?

SHEILA: It means that we've no excuse now for putting on airs and that if we've any sense we won't try. Father threw this girl out because she asked for decent wages. I went and pushed her further out, right into the street, just because I was angry and she was pretty. Gerald set her up as his mistress and then dropped her when it suited him. And now you're pretending you don't recognise her from that photograph. I admit I don't know why you should, but I know jolly well you did in fact recognise her, from the way you looked. And if you're not telling the truth, why should the Inspector apologise? And can't you see, both of you, you're making it worse?

She turns away. We hear the front door slam again.

BIRLING: That was the door again.

MRS. BIRLING: Gerald must have come back.

INSPECTOR: Unless your son has just gone out.

BIRLING: I'll see.

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He goes out quickly. INSPECTOR *turns to* MRS. BIRLING.

INSPECTOR: Mrs. Birling, you're a member—a prominent member—of the Brumley Women's Charity Organisation, aren't you?

MRS. BIRLING *does not reply*.

SHEILA: Go on, Mother. You might as well admit it. (*To INSPECTOR.*) Yes, she is. Why?

INSPECTOR (*calmly*): It's an organisation to which women in distress can appeal for help in various forms. Isn't that so?

MRS. BIRLING (*with dignity*): Yes. We've done a great deal of useful work in helping deserving cases.

INSPECTOR: There was a meeting of the interviewing committee two weeks ago?

MRS. BIRLING: I dare say there was.

INSPECTOR: You know very well there was, Mrs. Birling. You were in the chair.

MRS. BIRLING: And if I was, what business is it of yours?

INSPECTOR (*severely*): Do you want me to tell you—in plain words?

Enter BIRLING, looking rather agitated.

BIRLING: That must have been Eric.

MRS. BIRLING (*alarmed*): Have you been up to his room?

BIRLING: Yes. And I called out on both landings. It must have been Eric we heard go out then.

MRS. BIRLING: Silly boy! Where can he have gone to?

BIRLING: I can't imagine. But he was in one of his excitable queer moods, and even though we don't need him here——

INSPECTOR (*cutting in, sharply*): We do need him here. And if he's not back soon, I shall have to go and find him.

BIRLING and MRS. BIRLING *exchange bewildered and rather frightened glances.*

SHEILA: He's probably just gone to cool off. He'll be back soon.

INSPECTOR (*severely*): I hope so.

MRS. BIRLING: And why should you hope so?

INSPECTOR: I'll explain why when you've answered my questions, Mrs. Birling.

BIRLING: Is there any reason why my wife should answer questions from you, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: Yes, a very good reason. You'll remember that Mr. Croft told us—quite truthfully, I believe—that he hadn't spoken to or seen Eva Smith since last September. But Mrs. Birling spoke to and saw her only two weeks ago.

SHEILA (*astonished*): Mother!

BIRLING: Is this true?

MRS. BIRLING (*after a pause*): Yes, quite true.

INSPECTOR: She appealed to your organisation for help?

MRS. BIRLING: Yes.

INSPECTOR: Not as Eva Smith?

MRS. BIRLING: No. Nor as Daisy Renton.

INSPECTOR: As what then?

MRS. BIRLING: First, she called herself Mrs. Birling—

BIRLING (*astounded*): *Mrs. Birling!*

MRS. BIRLING: Yes. I think it was simply a piece of gross impertinence—quite deliberate—and naturally that was one of the things that prejudiced me against her case.

BIRLING: And I should think so! Damned impudence!

INSPECTOR: You admit being prejudiced against her case?

MRS. BIRLING: Yes.

SHEILA: Mother, she's just died a horrible death—don't forget. ⁴

MRS. BIRLING: I'm very sorry. But I think she had only herself to blame.

INSPECTOR: Was it owing to your influence, as the most prominent member of the committee, that help was refused the girl?

MRS. BIRLING: Possibly.

INSPECTOR: Was it or was it not your influence?

MRS. BIRLING (*stung*): Yes, it was. I didn't like her manner. She'd impertinently made use of our name, though she pretended afterwards it just happened to be the first she thought of. She had to admit, after I began questioning her, that she had no claim to the name, that she wasn't married, and that the story she told at first—about a husband who'd deserted her—was quite false. It didn't take me long to get the truth—or some of the truth—out of her.

INSPECTOR: Why did she want help?

MRS. BIRLING: You know very well why she wanted help.

INSPECTOR: No, I don't. I know why she *needed* help. But as I wasn't there, I don't know what she asked from your committee.

MRS. BIRLING: I don't think we need discuss it.

INSPECTOR: You have no hope of *not* discussing it, Mrs. Birling.

MRS. BIRLING: If you think you can bring any pressure to bear upon me, Inspector, you're quite mistaken. Unlike the other three, I did nothing I'm ashamed of or that won't bear investigation. The girl

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asked for assistance. We are asked to look carefully into the claims made upon us. I wasn't satisfied with this girl's claim—she seemed to me to be not a good case—and so I used my influence to have it refused. And in spite of what's happened to the girl since, I consider I did my duty. So if I prefer not to discuss it any further, you have no power to make me change my mind.

INSPECTOR: Yes I have.

MRS. BIRLING: No you haven't. Simply because I've done nothing wrong—and you know it.

INSPECTOR (*very deliberately*): I think you did something terribly wrong—and that you're going to spend the rest of your life regretting it. I wish you'd been with me to-night in the Infirmary. You'd have seen——

SHEILA (*bursting in*): No, no, please! Not that again. I've imagined it enough already.

INSPECTOR (*very deliberately*): Then the next time you imagine it, just remember that this girl was going to have a child.

SHEILA (*horrified*): No! Oh—horrible—horrible! How could she have wanted to kill herself?

INSPECTOR: Because she'd been turned out and turned down too many times. This was the end.

SHEILA: Mother, you must have known.

INSPECTOR: It was because she was going to have a child that she went for assistance to your mother's committee.

BIRLING: Look here, this wasn't Gerald Croft——

INSPECTOR (*cutting in, sharply*): No, no. Nothing to do with him.

SHEILA: Thank goodness for that! Though I don't know why I should care now.

INSPECTOR (*to MRS. BIRLING*): And you've nothing further to tell me, eh?

MRS. BIRLING: I'll tell you what I told her. Go and look for the father of the child. It's his responsibility.

INSPECTOR: That doesn't make it any the less yours. She came to you for help, at a time when no woman could have needed it more. And you not only refused it yourself but saw to it that the others refused it too. She was here alone, friendless, almost penniless, desperate. She needed not only money, but advice, sympathy, friendliness. You've had children. You must have known what she was feeling. And you slammed the door in her face.

SHEILA (*with feeling*): Mother, I think it was cruel and vile.

BIRLING (*dubiously*): I must say, Sybil, that when this comes out at

the inquest, it isn't going to do us much good. The Press might easily take it up——

MRS. BIRLING (*agitated now*): Oh, stop it, both of you. And please remember before you start accusing me of anything again that it wasn't I who had her turned out of her employment—which probably began it all. (*Turning to INSPECTOR*) In the circumstances I think I was justified. The girl had begun by telling us a pack of lies. Afterwards, when I got at the truth, I discovered that she knew who the father was, she was quite certain about that, and so I told her it was her business to make him responsible. If he refused to marry her—and in my opinion he ought to be compelled to—then he must at least support her.

INSPECTOR: And what did she reply to that?

MRS. BIRLING: Oh—a lot of silly nonsense!

INSPECTOR: What was it?

MRS. BIRLING: Whatever it was, I know it made me finally lose all patience with her. She was giving herself ridiculous airs. She was claiming elaborate fine feelings and scruples that were simply absurd in a girl in her position.

INSPECTOR (*very sternly*): Her position now is that she lies with a burnt-out inside on a slab. (*As BIRLING tries to protest, turns on him.*) Don't stammer and yammer at me again, man. I'm losing all patience with you people. *What did she say?*

MRS. BIRLING (*rather cowed*): She said that the father was only a youngster—silly and wild and drinking too much. There couldn't be any question of marrying him—it would be wrong for them both. He had given her money but she didn't want to take any more money from him.

INSPECTOR: Why didn't she want to take any more money from him?

MRS. BIRLING: All a lot of nonsense—I didn't believe a word of it.

INSPECTOR: I'm not asking you if you believed it. I want to know what she said. Why didn't she want to take any more money from this boy?

MRS. BIRLING: Oh—she had some fancy reason. As if a girl of that sort would ever refuse money!

INSPECTOR (*sternly*): I warn you, you're making it worse for yourself. What reason did she give for not taking any more money?

MRS. BIRLING: Her story was—that he'd said something one night, when he was drunk, that gave her the idea that it wasn't his money.

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INSPECTOR: Where had he got it from then?

MRS. BIRLING: He'd stolen it.

INSPECTOR: So she'd come to you for assistance because she didn't want to take stolen money?

MRS. BIRLING: That's the story she finally told, after I'd refused to believe her original story—that she was a married woman who'd been deserted by her husband. I didn't see any reason to believe that one story should be any truer than the other. Therefore, you're quite wrong to suppose I shall regret what I did.

INSPECTOR: But if her story was true, if this boy had been giving her stolen money, then she came to you for help because she wanted to keep this youngster out of any more trouble—isn't that so?

MRS. BIRLING: Possibly. But it sounded ridiculous to me. So I was perfectly justified in advising my committee not to allow her claim for assistance.

INSPECTOR: You're not even sorry now, when you know what happened to the girl?

MRS. BIRLING: I'm sorry she should have come to such a horrible end. But I accept no blame for it at all.

INSPECTOR: Who is to blame then?

MRS. BIRLING: First, the girl herself.

SHEILA (*bitterly*): For letting Father and me have her chucked out of her jobs!

MRS. BIRLING: Secondly, I blame the young man who was the father of the child she was going to have. If, as she said, he didn't belong to her class, and was some drunken young idler, then that's all the more reason why he shouldn't escape. He should be made an example of. If the girl's death is due to anybody, then it's due to him.

INSPECTOR: And if her story is true—that he was stealing money——

MRS. BIRLING (*rather agitated now*): There's no point in assuming that——

INSPECTOR: But suppose we do, what then?

MRS. BIRLING: Then he'd be entirely responsible—because the girl wouldn't have come to us, and have been refused assistance, if it hadn't been for him——

INSPECTOR: So he's the chief culprit anyhow.

MRS. BIRLING: Certainly. And he ought to be dealt with very severely——

SHEILA (*with sudden alarm*): Mother—stop—stop!

ACT II

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

BIRLING: Be quiet, Sheila!

SHEILA: But don't you see——

MRS. BIRLING (*severely*): You're behaving like an hysterical child to-night. (SHEILA *begins crying quietly*. MRS. BIRLING *turns to* INSPECTOR.) And if you'd take some steps to find this young man and then make sure that he's compelled to confess in public his responsibility—instead of staying here asking quite unnecessary questions—then you really would be doing your duty.

INSPECTOR (*grimly*): Don't worry, Mrs. Birling. I shall do my duty. (*He looks at his watch.*)

MRS. BIRLING (*triumphantly*): I'm glad to hear it.

INSPECTOR: No hushing up, eh? Make an example of the young man, eh? Public confession of responsibility—um?

MRS. BIRLING: Certainly. I consider it your duty. And now no doubt you'd like to say good night.

INSPECTOR: Not yet. I'm waiting.

MRS. BIRLING: Waiting for what?

INSPECTOR: To do my duty.

SHEILA (*distressed*). Now, Mother—don't you see?

MRS. BIRLING (*understanding now*): But surely . . . I mean . . . it's ridiculous . . .

She stops, and exchanges a frightened glance with her husband.

BIRLING (*terrified now*): Look, Inspector, you're not trying to tell us that—that my boy—is mixed up in this——?

INSPECTOR (*sternly*): If he is, then we know what to do, don't we? Mrs. Birling has just told us.

BIRLING (*thunderstruck*): My God! But—look here——

MRS. BIRLING (*agitated*): I don't believe it. I *won't* believe it . . .

SHEILA: Mother—I begged you and begged you to stop——

INSPECTOR holds up a hand. We hear the front door. They wait, looking towards door. ERIC enters, looking extremely pale and distressed. He meets their enquiring stares.

Curtain falls quickly.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT III

Exactly as at end of Act II. ERIC is standing just inside the room and the others are staring at him.

ERIC: You know, don't you?

INSPECTOR (*as before*): Yes, we know.

ERIC *shuts the door and comes further in.*

MRS. BIRLING (*distressed*): Eric, I can't believe it. There must be some mistake. You don't know what we've been saying.

SHEILA: It's a good job for him he doesn't, isn't it?

ERIC: Why?

SHEILA: Because mother's been busy blaming everything on the young man who got this girl into trouble, and saying he shouldn't escape and should be made an example of——

BIRLING: That's enough, Sheila.

ERIC (*bitterly*): You haven't made it any easier for me, have you. Mother?

MRS. BIRLING: But I didn't know it was *you*—I never dreamt, Besides, you're not that type—you don't get drunk——

SHEILA: Of course he does. I told you he did.

ERIC: *You* told her. Why, you little sneak!

SHEILA: No, that's not fair, Eric. I could have told her months ago, but of course I didn't. I only told her to-night because I knew everything was coming out—it was simply bound to come out to-night—so I thought she might as well know in advance. Don't forget—I've already been through it.

MRS. BIRLING: Sheila, I simply don't understand your attitude.

BIRLING: Neither do I. If you'd had any sense of loyalty——

INSPECTOR (*cutting in, smoothly*): Just a minute, Mrs. Birling. There'll be plenty of time, when I've gone, for you all to adjust your family relationships. But now I must hear what your son has to tell me. (*Sternly, to the three of them*) And I'll be obliged if you'll let us get on without any further interruptions. (*Turning to ERIC*) Now then.

ERIC (*miserably*): Could I have a drink first?

BIRLING (*explosively*): No.

ACT III

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

INSPECTOR (*firmly*): Yes. (*As BIRLING looks like interrupting explosively*) I know—he's your son and this is your house—but look at him. He needs a drink now just to see him through.

BIRLING (*to ERIC*): All right. Go on.

ERIC *goes for a whisky. His whole manner of handling the decanter and then the drink shows his familiarity with quick heavy drinking. The others watch him narrowly.*

(*Bitterly*) I understand a lot of things now I didn't understand before.

INSPECTOR: Don't start on that. I want to get on. (*To ERIC.*) When did you first meet this girl?

ERIC: One night last November.

INSPECTOR: Where did you meet her?

ERIC: In the Palace bar. I'd been there an hour or so with two or three chaps. I was a bit squiffy.

INSPECTOR: What happened then?

ERIC: I began talking to her, and stood her a few drinks. I was rather far gone by the time we had to go.

INSPECTOR: Was she drunk too?

ERIC: She told me afterwards that she was a bit, chiefly because she'd not had much to eat that day.

INSPECTOR: Why had she gone there——?

ERIC: She wasn't the usual sort. But—well, I suppose she didn't know what to do. There was some woman who wanted her to go there. I never quite understood about that.

INSPECTOR: You went with her to her lodgings that night?

ERIC: Yes, I insisted—it seems. I'm not very clear about it, but afterwards she told me she didn't want me to go in but that—well, I was in that state when a chap easily turns nasty—and I threatened to make a row.

INSPECTOR: So she let you in?

ERIC: And that's when it happened. And I didn't even remember—that's the hellish thing. Oh—my God!—how stupid it all is!

MRS. BIRLING (*with a cry*): Oh—Eric—how could you?

BIRLING (*sharply*): Sheila, take your mother along to the drawing-room——

SHEILA (*protesting*): But—I want to——

BIRLING (*very sharply*): You heard what I said. (*Gentler*) Go on, Sybil.

He goes to open the door while SHEILA takes her mother out. Then he closes it and comes in.

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INSPECTOR: When did you meet her again?

ERIC: About a fortnight afterwards.

INSPECTOR: By appointment?

ERIC: No. And I couldn't remember her name or where she lived. It was all very vague. But I happened to see her again in the Palace bar.

INSPECTOR: More drinks?

ERIC: Yes, though that time I wasn't so bad.

INSPECTOR: But you took her home again?

ERIC: Yes. And this time we talked a bit. She told me something about herself and I talked too. Told her my name and what I did.

INSPECTOR: And you made love again?

ERIC: Yes. I wasn't in love with her or anything—but I liked her—she was pretty and a good sport——

BIRLING (*harshly*): So you had to go to bed with her?

ERIC: Well, I'm old enough to be married, aren't I, and I'm not married, and I hate these fat old tarts round the town—the ones I see some of your respectable friends with——

BIRLING (*angrily*): I don't want any of that talk from you——

INSPECTOR (*very sharply*): I don't want any of it from either of you. Settle it afterwards. (*To ERIC.*) Did you arrange to see each other after that?

ERIC: Yes. And the next time—or the time after that—she told me she thought she was going to have a baby. She wasn't quite sure. And then she was.

INSPECTOR: And of course she was very worried about it?

ERIC: Yes, and so was I. I was in a hell of a state about it.

INSPECTOR: Did she suggest that you ought to marry her?

ERIC: No. She didn't want me to marry her. Said I didn't love her—and all that. In a way, she treated me—as if I were a kid. Though I was nearly as old as she was.

INSPECTOR: So what did you propose to do?

ERIC: Well, she hadn't a job—and didn't feel like trying again for one—and she'd no money left—so I insisted on giving her enough money to keep her going—until she refused to take any more——

INSPECTOR: How much did you give her altogether?

ERIC: I suppose—about fifty pounds all told.

BIRLING: Fifty pounds—on top of drinking and going round the town! Where did you get fifty pounds from?

As ERIC does not reply,

INSPECTOR: That's my question too.

ERIC (*miserably*): I got it—from the office——

BIRLING: *My* office?

ERIC: Yes.

INSPECTOR: You mean—you stole the money?

ERIC: Not really.

BIRLING (*angrily*): What do you mean—*not really*?

ERIC *does not reply because now* MRS. BIRLING and SHEILA come back.

SHEILA: This isn't my fault.

MRS. BIRLING (*to* BIRLING): I'm sorry, Arthur, but I simply couldn't stay in there. I had to know what's happening.

BIRLING (*savagely*): Well, I can tell you what's happening. He's admitted he was responsible for the girl's condition, and now he's telling us he supplied her with money he stole from the office.

MRS. BIRLING (*shocked*): Eric! You stole money?

ERIC: No, not really. I intended to pay it back.

BIRLING: We've heard that story before. How could you have paid it back?

ERIC: I'd have managed somehow. I had to have some money——

BIRLING: I don't understand how you could take as much as that out of the office without somebody knowing.

ERIC: There were some small accounts to collect, and I asked for cash——

BIRLING: Gave the firm's receipt and then kept the money, eh?

ERIC: Yes.

BIRLING: You must give me a list of those accounts. I've got to cover this up as soon as I can. You damned fool—why didn't you come to me when you found yourself in this mess?

ERIC: Because you're not the kind of father a chap could go to when he's in trouble—that's why.

BIRLING (*angrily*): Don't talk to me like that. Your trouble is—you've been spoilt——

INSPECTOR (*cutting in*): And my trouble is—that I haven't much time. You'll be able to divide the responsibility between you when I've gone. (*To* ERIC.) Just one last question, that's all. The girl discovered that this money you were giving her was stolen, didn't she?

ERIC (*miserably*): Yes. That was the worst of all. She wouldn't

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take any more, and she didn't want to see me again. (*Sudden startled tone*) Here, but how did you know that? Did she tell you?

INSPECTOR: No. She told me nothing. I never spoke to her.

SHEILA: She told mother.

MRS. BIRLING (*alarmed*): Sheila!

SHEILA: Well, he has to know.

ERIC (*to* MRS. BIRLING): She told you? Did she come here—but then she couldn't have done, she didn't even know I lived here. What happened? (MRS. BIRLING, *distressed, shakes her head but does not reply*.) Come on, don't just look like that. Tell me—tell me—what happened?

INSPECTOR (*with calm authority*): I'll tell you. She went to your mother's committee for help, after she'd done with you. Your mother refused that help.

ERIC (*nearly at breaking point*): Then—you killed her. She came to you to protect me—and you turned her away—yes, and you killed her—and the child she'd have had too—my child—your own grandchild—you killed them both—damn you, damn you——

MRS. BIRLING (*very distressed now*): No—Eric—please—I didn't know—I didn't understand——

ERIC (*almost threatening her*): You don't understand anything. You never did. You never even tried—you——

SHEILA (*frightened*): Eric, don't—don't——

BIRLING (*furiously, intervening*): Why, you hysterical young fool—get back—or I'll——

INSPECTOR (*taking charge, masterfully*): Stop! (*They are suddenly quiet, staring at him.*) And be quiet for a moment and listen to me. I don't need to know any more. Neither do you. This girl killed herself—and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget it. (*He looks from one to the other of them carefully.*) But then I don't think you ever will. Remember what you did, Mrs. Birling. You turned her away when she most needed help. You refused her even the pitiable little bit of organised charity you had in your power to grant her. Remember what you did——

ERIC (*unhappily*): My God—I'm not likely to forget.

INSPECTOR: Just used her for the end of a stupid drunken evening, as if she was an animal, a thing, not a person. No, you won't forget. (*He looks at SHEILA.*)

SHEILA (*bitterly*): I know. I had her turned out of a job. I started it.

INSPECTOR: You helped—but didn't start it. (*Rather savagely, to BIRLING.*) You started it. She wanted twenty-five shillings a week

instead of twenty-two and sixpence. You made her pay a heavy price for that. And now she'll make you pay a heavier price still.

BIRLING (*unhappily*): Look, Inspector—I'd give thousands—yes, thousands—

INSPECTOR: You're offering the money at the wrong time, Mr. Birling. (*He makes a move as if concluding the session, possibly shutting up notebook, etc. Then surveys them sardonically.*) No, I don't think any of you will forget. Nor that young man, Croft, though he at least had some affection for her and made her happy for a time. Well, Eva Smith's gone. You can't do her any more harm. And you can't do her any good now, either. You can't even say "I'm sorry, Eva Smith."

SHEILA (*who is crying quietly*): That's the worst of it.

INSPECTOR: But just remember this. One Eva Smith has gone—but there are millions and millions and millions of Eva Smiths and John Smiths still left with us, with their lives, their hopes and fears, their suffering, and chance of happiness, all intertwined with our lives, with what we think and say and do. We don't live alone. We are members of one body. We are responsible for each other. And I tell you that the time will soon come when, if men will not learn that lesson, then they will be taught it in fire and blood and anguish. Good night.

He walks straight out, leaving them staring, subdued and wondering. SHEILA is still quietly crying. MRS. BIRLING has collapsed into a chair. ERIC is brooding desperately. BIRLING, the only active one, hears the front door slam, moves hesitatingly towards the door, stops, looks gloomily at the other three, then pours himself out a drink, which he hastily swallows.

BIRLING (*angrily to ERIC*): You're the one I blame for this.

ERIC: I'll bet I am.

BIRLING (*angrily*): Yes, and you don't realise yet all you've done. Most of this is bound to come out. There'll be a public scandal.

ERIC: Well, I don't care now.

BIRLING: You! You don't seem to care about anything. But I care. I was almost certain for a knighthood in the next Honours List—

ERIC laughs rather hysterically, pointing at him.

ERIC (*laughing*): Oh—for God's sake! What does it matter now whether they give you a knighthood or not?

BIRLING (*stormily*): It doesn't matter to you. Apparently nothing matters to you. But it may interest you to know that until every penny of that money you stole is repaid, you'll work for nothing. And there's going to be no more of this drinking round the town—and picking up women in the Palace bar—

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MRS. BIRLING (*coming to life*): I should think not. Eric, I'm absolutely ashamed of you.

ERIC: Well, I don't blame you. But don't forget I'm ashamed of you as well—yes, both of you.

BIRLING (*angrily*): Drop that. There's every excuse for what both your mother and I did—it turned out unfortunately, that's all——

SHEILA (*scornfully*): *That's all.*

BIRLING: Well, what have you to say?

SHEILA: I don't know where to begin.

BIRLING: Then don't begin. Nobody wants you to.

SHEILA: I behaved badly too. I know I did. I'm ashamed of it. But now you're beginning all over again to pretend that nothing much has happened——

BIRLING: Nothing much has happened! Haven't I already said there'll be a public scandal—unless we're lucky—and who here will suffer from that more than I will?

SHEILA: But that's not what I'm talking about. I don't care about that. The point is, you don't seem to have learnt anything.

BIRLING: Don't I? Well, you're quite wrong there. I've learnt plenty to-night. And you don't want me to tell you what I've learnt, I hope. When I look back on to-night—when I think of what I was feeling when the five of us sat down to dinner at that table——

(ERIC (*cutting in*): Yes, and do you remember what you said to Gerald and me after dinner, when you were feeling so pleased with yourself? You told us that a man has to make his own way, look after himself and mind his own business, and that we weren't to take any notice of these cranks who tell us that everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together. Do you remember? Yes—and then one of those cranks walked in—the Inspector. (*Laughs bitterly.*) I didn't notice you told him that it's every man for himself.

SHEILA (*sharply attentive*): Is that when the Inspector came, just after Father had said that?

ERIC: Yes. What of it?)

MRS. BIRLING: Now what's the matter, Sheila?

SHEILA (*slowly*): It's queer—very queer—— (*she looks at them reflectively.*)

MRS. BIRLING (*with some excitement*): I know what you're going to say. Because I've been wondering myself.

SHEILA: It doesn't much matter now, of course—but *was* he really a police inspector?

BIRLING: Well, if he wasn't, it matters a devil of a lot. Makes all the difference.

SHEILA: No, it doesn't.

BIRLING: Don't talk rubbish. Of course it does.

SHEILA: Well, it doesn't to me. And it oughtn't to you, either.

MRS. BIRLING: Don't be childish, Sheila.

SHEILA (*flaring up*): I'm not being. If you want to know, it's you two who are being childish—trying not to face the facts.

BIRLING: I won't have that sort of talk. Any more of that and you leave this room.

ERIC: That'll be terrible for her, won't it?

SHEILA: I'm going anyhow in a minute or two. But don't you see, if all that's come out to-night is true, then it doesn't much matter who it was who made us confess. And it *was* true, wasn't it? You turned the girl out of one job, and I had her turned out of another. Gerald kept her—at a time when he was supposed to be too busy to see me. Eric—well, we know what Eric did. And mother hardened her heart and gave her the final push that finished her. That's what's important—and not whether a man is a police inspector or not.

ERIC: He was our police inspector all right.

SHEILA: That's what I mean, Eric. But if it's any comfort to you—and it isn't to me—I have an idea—and I had it all along vaguely—that there was something curious about him. He never seemed like an ordinary police inspector—

BIRLING (*rather excited*): You're right. I felt it too. (*To MRS. BIRLING.*) Didn't you?

MRS. BIRLING: Well, I must say his manner was quite extraordinary; so—so rude—and assertive—

BIRLING: Then look at the way he talked to me. Telling me to shut up—and so on. He must have known I was an ex-Lord Mayor and a magistrate and so forth. Besides—the way he talked—you remember. I mean, they don't *talk* like that. I've had dealings with dozens of them.

SHEILA: All right. But it doesn't make any real difference, y'know.

MRS. BIRLING: Of course it does.

ERIC: No, Sheila's right. It doesn't.

BIRLING (*angrily*): That's comic, that is, coming from you. You're the one it makes *most* difference to. You've confessed to theft, and now he knows all about it, and he can bring it out at the inquest, and then if necessary carry it to court. He can't do anything to your mother

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and Sheila and me—except perhaps make us look a bit ashamed of ourselves in public—but as for you, he can ruin you. You know.

SHEILA (*slowly*): We hardly ever told him anything he didn't know. Did you notice that?

BIRLING: That's nothing. He had a bit of information, left by the girl, and made a few smart guesses—but the fact remains that if we hadn't talked so much, he'd have had little to go on. (*Looks angrily at them.*) And really, when I come to think of it, why you all had to go letting everything come out like that, beats me.

SHEILA: It's all right talking like that now. But he made us confess.

MRS. BIRLING: He certainly didn't make me *confess*—as you call it. I told him quite plainly that I thought I had done no more than my duty.

SHEILA: Oh—Mother!

BIRLING: The fact is, you allowed yourselves to be bluffed. Yes—bluffed.

MRS. BIRLING (*protesting*): Now really—Arthur.

BIRLING: No, not you, my dear. But these two. That fellow obviously didn't like us. He was prejudiced from the start. Probably a Socialist or some sort of crank—he talked like one. And then, instead of standing up to him, you let him bluff you into talking about your private affairs. You ought to have stood up to him.

ERIC (*sulkily*): Well, I didn't notice you standing up to him.

BIRLING: No, because by that time you'd admitted you'd been taking money. What chance had I after that? I was a fool not to have insisted upon seeing him alone.

ERIC: That wouldn't have worked.

SHEILA: Of course it wouldn't.

MRS. BIRLING: Really, from the way you children talk, you might be wanting to help him instead of us. Now just be quiet so that your father can decide what we ought to do. (*Looks expectantly at BIRLING.*)

BIRLING (*dubiously*): Yes—well. We'll have to do something—and get to work quickly too. (*As he hesitates there is a ring at the front door. They look at each other in alarm.*) Now who's this? Had I better go?

(MRS. BIRLING: No. Edna'll go. I asked her to wait up to make us some tea.

SHEILA: It might be Gerald coming back.

BIRLING (*relieved*): Yes, of course. I'd forgotten about him.

EDNA *appears*.

EDNA: It's Mr. Croft.

GERALD *appears, and* EDNA *withdraws*.

GERALD: I hope you don't mind my coming back?

MRS. BIRLING: No, of course not, Gerald.

GERALD: I had a special reason for coming. When did that Inspector go?

SHEILA: Only a few minutes ago. He put us all through it——

MRS. BIRLING (*warningly*): Sheila!

SHEILA: Gerald might as well know.

BIRLING (*hastily*): Now—now—we needn't bother him with all that stuff.

SHEILA: All right. (*To* GERALD.) But we're all in it—up to the neck. It got worse after you left.

GERALD: How did he behave?

SHEILA: He was—frightening.

BIRLING: If you ask me, he behaved in a very peculiar and suspicious manner.

MRS. BIRLING: The rude way he spoke to Mr. Birling and me—it was quite extraordinary!

GERALD: Hm—hm!

They all look enquiringly at GERALD.

BIRLING (*excitedly*): You know something. What is it?

GERALD (*slowly*): That man wasn't a police officer.

BIRLING (*astounded*): What?

MRS. BIRLING: Are you certain?

GERALD: I'm almost certain. That's what I came back to tell you.

BIRLING (*excitedly*): Good lad! You asked about him, eh?

GERALD: Yes. I met a police sergeant I know down the road. I asked him about this Inspector Goole and described the chap carefully to him. He swore there wasn't any Inspector Goole or anybody like him on the force here.

BIRLING: You didn't tell him——

GERALD (*cutting in*): No, no. I passed it off by saying I'd been having an argument with somebody. But the point is—this sergeant was dead certain they hadn't any inspector at all like the chap who came here.

BIRLING (*excitedly*): By Jingo! A fake!

MRS. BIRLING (*triumphantly*): Didn't I tell you? Didn't I say I couldn't image a real police inspector talking like that to us?

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GERALD: Well, you were right. There isn't any such inspector. We've been had.

BIRLING (*beginning to move*): I'm going to make certain of this.

MRS. BIRLING: What are you going to do?

BIRLING: Ring up the Chief Constable—Colonel Roberts.

MRS. BIRLING: Careful what you say, dear.

BIRLING (*now at telephone*): Of course. (*At telephone.*) Brumley eight seven five two. (*To others as he waits.*) I was going to do this anyhow. I've had my suspicions all along. (*At telephone.*) Colonel Roberts, please. Mr. Arthur Birling here. . . . Oh, Roberts—Birling here. Sorry to ring you up so late, but can you tell me if an Inspector Goole has joined your staff lately . . . Goole. G-O-O-L-E . . . a new man . . . tall, clean-shaven. (*Here he can describe the appearance of the actor playing the INSPECTOR.*) I see . . . yes . . . well, that settles it. . . . No, just a little argument we were having here. . . . Good night. (*He puts down the telephone and looks at the others.*) There's no Inspector Goole on the police. That man definitely wasn't a police inspector at all. As Gerald says—we've been had.

MRS. BIRLING: I felt it all the time. He never talked like one. He never even looked like one.

BIRLING: This makes a difference, y'know. In fact, it makes *all* the difference.

GERALD: Of course!

SHEILA (*bitterly*): I suppose we're all nice people now.

BIRLING: If you've nothing more sensible than that to say, Sheila, you'd better keep quiet.

ERIC: She's right, though.

BIRLING (*angrily*): And *you'd* better keep quiet anyhow. If that *had* been a police inspector and he'd heard you confess—

MRS. BIRLING (*warningly*): Arthur—careful!

BIRLING (*hastily*): Yes, yes.†

SHEILA: You see, Gerald, you haven't to know the rest of our crimes and idiocies.

GERALD: That's all right, I don't want to. (*To BIRLING.*) What do you make of this business now? Was it a hoax?

BIRLING: Of course. Somebody put that fellow up to coming here and hoaxing us. There are people in this town who dislike me enough to do that. We ought to have seen through it from the first. In the ordinary way, I believe I would have done. But coming like that, bang on top of our little celebration, just when we were all feeling so pleased with ourselves, naturally it took me by surprise.

MRS. BIRLING: I wish I'd been here when that man first arrived. I'd have asked *him* a few questions before I allowed him to ask us any.

SHEILA: It's all right saying that now.

MRS. BIRLING: I was the only one of you who didn't give in to him. And now I say we must discuss this business quietly and sensibly and decide if there's anything to be done about it.

BIRLING (*with hearty approval*): You're absolutely right, my dear. Already we've discovered one important fact—that that fellow was a fraud and we've been hoaxed—and that may not be the end of it by any means.

GERALD: I'm sure it isn't.

BIRLING (*keenly interested*): You are, eh? Good! (*To ERIC, who is restless.*) Eric, sit down.

ERIC (*sulkily*): I'm all right.

BIRLING: All right? You're anything but all right. And you needn't stand there—as if—as if——

ERIC: As if—what?

BIRLING: As if you'd nothing to do with us. Just remember your own position, young man. If anybody's up to the neck in this business, you are, so you'd better take some interest in it.

ERIC: I do take some interest in it. I take too much, that's my trouble.

SHEILA: It's mine too.

BIRLING: Now listen, you two. If you're still feeling on edge, then the least you can do is to keep quiet. Leave this to us. I'll admit that fellow's antics rattled us a bit. But we've found him out—and all we have to do is to keep our heads. Now it's our turn.

SHEILA: Our turn to do—what?

MRS. BIRLING (*sharply*): To behave sensibly, Sheila—which is more than you're doing.

ERIC (*bursting out*): What's the use of talking about behaving sensibly? You're beginning to pretend now that nothing's really happened at all. And I can't see it like that. This girl's still dead, isn't she? Nobody's brought her to life, have they?

SHEILA (*eagerly*): That's just what I feel, Eric. And it's what they don't seem to understand.

ERIC: Whoever that chap was, the fact remains that I did what I did. And Mother did what she did. And the rest of you did what you did to her. It's still the same rotten story whether it's been told to a police inspector or to somebody else. According to you, I ought to

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feel a lot better—— (*To GERALD.*) I stole some money, Gerald, you might as well know—— (*As BIRLING tries to interrupt*) I don't care, let him know. The money's not the important thing. It's what happened to the girl and what we all did to her that matters. And I still feel the same about it, and that's why I don't feel like sitting down and having a nice cosy talk.

SHEILA: And Eric's absolutely right. And it's the best thing any one of us has said to-night and it makes me feel a bit less ashamed of us. You're just beginning to pretend all over again.

BIRLING: Look—for God's sake!

MRS. BIRLING (*protesting*): Arthur!

BIRLING: Well, my dear, they're so damned exasperating. They just won't try to understand our position or to see the difference between a lot of stuff like this coming out in private and a downright public scandal.

ERIC (*shouting*): And I say the girl's dead and we all helped to kill her—and that's what matters——

BIRLING (*also shouting, threatening ERIC*): And I say—either stop shouting or get out. (*Glaring at him but in quiet tone*) Some fathers I know would have kicked you out of the house anyhow by this time. So hold your tongue if you want to stay here.

ERIC (*quietly, bitterly*): I don't give a damn now whether I stay here or not.

BIRLING: You'll stay here long enough to give me an account of that money you stole—yes, and to pay it back too.

SHEILA: But that won't bring Eva Smith back to life, will it?

ERIC: And it doesn't alter the fact that we all helped to kill her.

GERALD: But is it a fact?

ERIC: Of course it is. You don't know the whole story yet.

SHEILA: I suppose you're going to prove now you didn't spend last summer keeping this girl instead of seeing me, eh?

GERALD: I did keep a girl last summer. I've admitted it. And I'm sorry, Sheila.

SHEILA: Well, I must admit you came out of it better than the rest of us. The Inspector said that.

BIRLING (*angrily*): He wasn't an Inspector.

SHEILA (*flaring up*): Well, he inspected us all right. And don't let's start dodging and pretending now. Between us we drove that girl to commit suicide.

GERALD: Did we? Who says so? Because I say—there's no more

real evidence we did than there was that that chap was a police inspector.

SHEILA: Of course there is.

GERALD: No, there isn't. Look at it. A man comes here pretending to be a police officer. It's a hoax of some kind. Now what does he do? Very artfully, working on bits of information he's picked up here and there, he bluffs us into confessing that we've all been mixed up in this girl's life in one way or another.

ERIC: And so we have.

GERALD: *But how do you know it's the same girl?*

BIRLING (*eagerly*): Now wait a minute! Let's see how that would work. Now—— (*hesitates*) no, it wouldn't.

ERIC: We all admitted it.

GERALD: All right, you all admitted something to do with a girl. But how do you know it's the same girl?

He looks round triumphantly at them. As they puzzle this out, he turns to BIRLING, after pause.

Look here, Mr. Birling. You sack a girl called Eva Smith. You've forgotten, but he shows you a photograph of her and then you remember. Right?

BIRLING: Yes, that part's straightforward enough. But what then?

GERALD: Well, then he happens to know that Sheila once had a girl sacked from Milwards shop. He tells us that it's this same Eva Smith. And he shows her a photograph that she recognises.

SHEILA: Yes. The same photograph.

GERALD: How do you know it's the same photograph? Did you see the one your father looked at?

SHEILA: No, I didn't.

GERALD: And did your father see the one he showed you?

SHEILA: No, he didn't. And I see what you mean now.

GERALD: We've no proof it was the same photograph and therefore no proof it was the same girl. Now take me. I never saw a photograph, remember. He caught me out by suddenly announcing that this girl changed her name to Daisy Renton. I gave myself away at once because I'd known a Daisy Renton.

BIRLING (*eagerly*): And there wasn't the slightest proof that this Daisy Renton was really Eva Smith. We've only his word for it, and we'd his word for it that he was a police inspector, and we know now he was lying. So he could have been lying all the time.

GERALD: Of course he could. Probably was. Now what happened after I left?

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MRS. BIRLING: I was upset because Eric had left the house, and this man said that if Eric didn't come back, he'd have to go and find him. Well, that made me feel worse still. And his manner was so severe and he seemed so confident. Then quite suddenly he said I'd seen Eva Smith only two weeks ago.

BIRLING: Those were his exact words.

MRS. BIRLING: And like a fool I said Yes I had.

BIRLING: I don't see now why you did that. She didn't call herself Eva Smith when she came to see you at the committee, did she?

MRS. BIRLING: No, of course she didn't. But, feeling so worried, when he suddenly turned on me with those questions, I answered more or less as he wanted me to answer.

SHEILA: But, Mother, don't forget that he showed you a photograph of the girl before that, and you obviously recognised it.

GERALD: Did anybody else see it?

MRS. BIRLING: No, he showed it only to me.

GERALD: Then, don't you see, there's still no proof it was really the same girl. He might have showed you the photograph of any girl who applied to the committee. And how do we know she was really Eva Smith or Daisy Renton?

BIRLING: Gerald's dead right. He could have used a different photograph each time and we'd be none the wiser. We may all have been recognising different girls.

GERALD: Exactly. Did he ask you to identify a photograph, Eric?

ERIC: No. He didn't need a photograph by the time he'd got round to me. But obviously it must have been the girl I knew who went round to see mother.

GERALD: Why must it?

ERIC: She said she had to have help because she wouldn't take any more stolen money. And the girl I knew had told me that already.

GERALD: Even then, that may have been all nonsense.

ERIC: I don't see much nonsense about it when a girl goes and kills herself. You lot may be letting yourselves out nicely, but I can't. Nor can mother. We did her in all right.

BIRLING (*eagerly*): Wait a minute, wait a minute! Don't be in such a hurry to put yourself into court. That interview with your mother could have been just as much a put-up job, like all this police inspector business. The whole damned thing can have been a piece of bluff.

ERIC (*angrily*): How can it? The girl's dead, isn't she?

GERALD: What girl? There were probably four or five different girls.

ERIC: That doesn't matter to me. The one I knew is dead.

BIRLING: Is she? *How do we know she is?*

GERALD: That's right. You've got it. How do we know any girl killed herself to-day?

BIRLING (*looking at them all, triumphantly*): Now answer that one. Let's look at it from this fellow's point of view. We're having a little celebration here and feeling rather pleased with ourselves. Now he has to work a trick on us. Well, the first thing he has to do is to give us such a shock that after that he can bluff us all the time. So he starts right off. A girl has just died in the Infirmary. She drank some strong disinfectant. Died in agony——

ERIC: All right, don't pile it on.

BIRLING (*triumphantly*): There you are, you see. Just repeating it shakes you a bit. And that's what he had to do. Shake us at once—and then start questioning us—until we didn't know where we were. Oh—let's admit that. He had the laugh of us all right.

ERIC: He could laugh his head off—if I knew it really was all a hoax.

BIRLING: I'm convinced it is. No police enquiry. No one girl that all this happens to. No scandal——

SHEILA: And no suicide?

GERALD (*decisively*): We can settle that at once.

SHEILA: How?

GERALD: By ringing up the Infirmary. Either there's a dead girl there or there isn't.

BIRLING (*uneasily*): It will look a bit queer, won't it—ringing up at this time of night——

GERALD: I don't mind doing it.

MRS. BIRLING (*emphatically*): And if there isn't——

GERALD: Anyway we'll see. (*He goes to telephone and looks up number. The others watch tensely.*) Brumley eight nine eight six. . . . Is that the Infirmary? This is Mr. Gerald Croft—of Crofts Limited. . . . Yes. . . . We're rather worried about one of our employees. Have you had a girl brought in this afternoon who committed suicide by drinking disinfectant—or any like suicide? Yes, I'll wait.

As he waits, the others show their nervous tension. BIRLING wipes his brow, SHEILA shivers, ERIC clasps and unclasps his hand, etc.

Yes? . . . You're certain of that. . . . I see. Well, thank you very much. . . . Good night. (*He puts down telephone and looks at them.*) No girl has died in there to-day. Nobody's been brought in after drinking disinfectant. They haven't had a suicide for months.

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BIRLING (*triumphantly*): There you are! Proof positive. The whole story's just a lot of moonshine. Nothing but an elaborate sell! (*He produces a huge sigh of relief.*) Nobody likes to be sold as badly as that—but—for all that—— (*he smiles at them all*) Gerald, have a drink.

GERALD (*smiling*): Thanks, I think I could just do with one now.

BIRLING (*going to sideboard*): So could I.

MRS. BIRLING (*smiling*): And I must say, Gerald, you've argued this very cleverly, and I'm most grateful.

GERALD (*going for his drink*): Well, you see, while I was out of the house I'd time to cool off and think things out a little.

BIRLING (*giving him a drink*): Yes, he didn't keep you on the run as he did the rest of us. I'll admit now he gave me a bit of a scare at the time. But I'd a special reason for not wanting any public scandal just now. (*Has his drink now, and raises his glass.*) Well, here's to us. Come on, Sheila, don't look like that. All over now.

SHEILA: The worst part is. But you're forgetting one thing I still can't forget. Everything we said had happened really had happened. If it didn't end tragically, then that's lucky for us. But it might have done.

BIRLING (*jovially*): But the whole thing's different now. Come, come, you can see that, can't you? (*Imitating INSPECTOR in his final speech.*) *You all helped to kill her.* (*Pointing at SHEILA and ERIC, and laughing.*) And I wish you could have seen the look on your faces when he said that. (*SHEILA moves towards door.*) Going to bed, young woman?

SHEILA (*tensely*): I want to get out of this. It frightens me the way you talk.

BIRLING (*heartily*): Nonsense! You'll have a good laugh over it yet. Look, you'd better ask Gerald for that ring you gave back to him, hadn't you? Then you'll feel better.

SHEILA (*passionately*): You're pretending everything's just as it was before.

ERIC: I'm not!

SHEILA: No, but these others are.

BIRLING: Well, isn't it? We've been had, that's all.

SHEILA: So nothing really happened. So there's nothing to be sorry for, nothing to learn. We can all go on behaving just as we did.

MRS. BIRLING: Well, why shouldn't we?

SHEILA: I tell you—whoever that Inspector was, it was anything but a joke. You knew it then. You began to learn something. And now you've stopped. You're ready to go on in the same old way.

ACT III

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

BIRLING (*amused*): And you're not, eh?

SHEILA: No, because I remember what he said, how he looked, and what he made me feel. Fire and blood and anguish. And it frightens me the way you talk, and I can't listen to any more of it.

ERIC: And I agree with Sheila. It frightens me too.

BIRLING: Well, go to bed then, and don't stand there being hysterical.

MRS. BIRLING: They're over-tired. In the morning they'll be as amused as we are.

GERALD: Everything's all right now, Sheila. (*Holds up the ring.*) What about this ring?

SHEILA: No, not yet. It's too soon. I must think.

BIRLING (*pointing to ERIC and SHEILA*): Now look at the pair of them—the famous younger generation who know it all. And they can't even take a joke——

The telephone rings sharply. There is a moment's complete silence. BIRLING goes to answer it.

Yes? . . . Mr. Birling speaking. . . . What?—Here——

But obviously the other person has rung off. He puts the telephone down slowly and looks in a panic-stricken fashion at the others.

BIRLING: That was the police. A girl has just died—on her way to the Infirmary—after swallowing some disinfectant. And a police inspector is on his way here—to ask some—questions——

As they stare guiltily and dumbfounded, the curtain falls.

END OF PLAY

HOME IS TOMORROW

A Play in Two Acts

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

LADY (JILL) FORTROSE
NILS DAYTON
ANN WESTFIELD
SIR GEORGE SURREY
SIR EDWARD FORTROSE
LOUIS RIBERAC
DR. MELNIK
PROFESSOR CHU
KARAM
ROSA OLACCA
FELIPE
LERMA
VEZABAR

ACT I

SCENE I. Early evening
SCENE II. Morning, two days later

ACT II

SCENE I. Late afternoon, a fortnight later.
SCENE II. Night, same day

Action throughout takes place in Sir Edward Fortrose's house, just outside Port San Pedro, on the island of Corabana in the South Caribbean.

At the present time.

Home is Tomorrow—Copyright, 1950, by J. B. Priestley

This edition of “Home is Tomorrow” is dedicated to the cast, which, with characters in order of appearance was as follows:

LADY FORTROSE	IRENE WORTH
NILS DAYTON	GORDON TANNER
ANN WESTFIELD	HELEN BACKLIN
SIR GEORGE SURREY	DOUGLAS JEFFERIES
SIR EDWARD FORTROSE	LESLIE BANKS
LOUIS RIBERAC	ALAN WHEATLEY
DR. MELNIK	CECIL TROUNCER
PROFESSOR CHU	JOHN RUDDOCK
KARAM	JOHN NILSSON
ROSA OLACCA	JOY PARKER
FELIPE	EDGAR WHITBURN
LERMA	GEOFFREY DUNN
VEZABAR	BEN ASTAR

Directed by MICHAEL MACOWAN
Decor by JANOS HORVATH

ACT I

SCENE I

A wide rectangular room, part of a large house in a tropical island. Down stage left (actors') is an ordinary door leading to the administration offices. On the back wall are three double doors with louvres leading to a balcony, and behind this balcony can be seen some tropical foliage, and in the distance sharp mountain peaks and the sky. On the right wall, about centre, is a double door with louvres leading to the living quarters of the house.

This room, which is plainly furnished and decorated, preferably having very light walls, is something between an office and a sitting-room, and is in fact the room where SIR EDWARD FORTROSE does most of his work and sees people. The office part of the room is on the left. There is a large modern desk there, and behind it a bookcase and filing cabinet, and on the left wall is a large map of U.N.O., and at the left end of the back wall is a fairly large map of Corabana itself with the four different sections of the island differently coloured. There is a lamp on the desk and also a large standard lamp in the right upstage corner, and another smaller lamp preferably on a very narrow table downstage of the right wall. There are various chairs scattered about the room, and if possible these should be very light cane arm-chairs that can be easily moved. All fittings and furnishings should be modern; there should be no carpet but a painted stage cloth to suggest either fine matting or tiles; and the general effect, though not bleak, should be rather impersonal.

When the scene opens it is early evening. The open doors on the back show a pale murky green sky, which soon fades with the dark peaks silhouetted against it. Light is coming from the louvres on the right, behind which a party is taking place. We can hear the chatter of the guests, the clatter of glasses and plates, and some distant music. There is enough light coming through to show that the stage is empty. After a few moments of party noises we hear the following dialogue off stage.

GIRL (*just off*): But--UNUTO! It sounds like a fountain-pen or something. . . .

DR. MELNIK (*off, boisterously*): But he's not UNUTO—he's UNESCO—

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

OLDER WOMAN (*off*): Oh—dear! All these new words. It's like another language, isn't it?

PROF. CHU (*soft but very clear, off*): Yes. But only a little new language. And I think it would be better to learn it—very quick.

He laughs in his own fashion. The women join in doubtfully.

JILL FORTROSE and NILS DAYTON now slip into the room quietly from right and NILS as he comes in pushes back—or alternatively swings to behind him—one of the two doors, the lower one, thereby darkening a little the downstage right corner where they are. Each still has a glass. These prevent their embracing with any passion but they do embrace, and then whisper.

DAYTON (*with fervour*): Darling!

JILL (*with not quite so much fervour*): Darling!

DAYTON: Gosh—this is wonderful.

JILL: We can't stay, though. Much too risky.

DAYTON: I know. But just for a minute. It's been five whole days.

JILL: Your fault, not mine.

DAYTON: I had to be up there. Came back the minute the job was done.

JILL: What job? What's it all about?

DAYTON: Can't tell you yet.

JILL: When can you?

DAYTON: Soon. Depends on you, though. When you come through, then I'll come through.

JILL: Then we'll both have to wait a little longer.

DAYTON: Don't make it too tough for me. I'm crazy about you.

JILL (*with more fervour now*): Darling!

As they embrace—or she puts a hand to his cheek and he puts his hand over hers—ANN WESTFIELD enters right and quickly switches on light near door, lighting up all that end of room. JILL and DAYTON spring apart, turn and stare at ANN. All three are now clearly seen: JILL is about thirty-five, intensely feminine, beautiful and dressed with great style. She has a clear-cut upper-class English accent. ANN is a New Englander, about thirty, rather severe in appearance and style but by no means unattractive. NILS DAYTON is about thirty-five, tall, fair, good-looking, a Californian with a Swedish mother. He is extremely well-dressed in the Californian-tropical style. He affects an easy boyish manner but it is not quite convincing—and there is something wrong. It is quite clear that the two women thoroughly dislike each other, and have stopped even pretending that they don't.

ANN (*rather pointedly*): Oh! Sorry!

DAYTON (*not carrying it off too well*): Couldn't find that darned switch.

JILL (*calmly*): I wouldn't bother, Nils. Even if it were true she wouldn't believe you.

ANN (*ignoring this*): I was told to come in here and turn on some lights. Edward—Sir Edward——

She is now moving across the room.

JILL (*cutting in*): No, no—just Edward. Don't let's pretend about that either. Is he going to use this room?

ANN (*now over on left*): He said he wanted some of us to meet Sir George Surrey in here—out of the rumpus. *campuslangia*

She has now switched on the other lights and the room is completely illuminated. If back doors are used, here she would close them.

DAYTON: I'd better beat it.

JILL: There's no hurry—and you certainly mustn't leave the party. Help me to entertain the rest of the mob. They won't be staying long.

As she begins to move, slowly, up towards right, SIR GEORGE SURREY enters, rather uncertainly, like a man in unfamiliar surroundings. He is a solid, very English type, in his late fifties, and not so stupid as he seems. Unlike the others he is not dressed for this climate, and so he is uncomfortably warm and keeps mopping his face. He is tired and rather dazed, but does his best.

SURREY: Ah—Lady Fortrose—your husband asked me to come in here—to meet some of his staff. Warm, isn't it. (*Mops his face.*)

JILL (*with much charm*): Poor man, you're having a miserable time, aren't you? It's all Edward's fault——

SURREY: No—no—that's all right. Rather fagged, though.

JILL: I warned him that the very most you'd want to cope with would be a tiny dinner party—after all this air travel and being shot about like a mad parcel.

SURREY: Quite. Trouble is, you hardly know where you are. Four days ago I was planting out my rose trees in Bagshot. Then—Rio. Now—here. Tomorrow possibly—with luck—Mexico City. Then Washington—and Lake Success.

JILL (*smiling*): And really—you'd much rather be in Bagshot.

SURREY: Certainly. Wouldn't you?

JILL (*with deliberate hesitation*): I'm not—sure.

DAYTON *looks at her quickly.*

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ANN (*who has now come nearer*): Sir George—have you met Mr. Dayton?

SURREY: Yes—rather. Met in the other room, didn't we?

DAYTON: We did. And I found you a Scotch highball. What about another?

SURREY: Well——

JILL: Yes, of course. Hurry, Nils, and bring a nice cold one—mix it yourself.

DAYTON (*as he goes*): You bet! (*Goes out right.*)

SURREY: Very good of you. Only thing I can take at these affairs—whisky and soda. Good clean drink.

JILL (*smilingly*): I never know what that means—but it's heavenly hearing somebody say it again. My father always used to say it—Good Clean Drink. But what on earth is happening to Edward?

ANN (*making a move up right*): I'd better go and see.

JILL (*sweetly*): If you don't mind.

ANN (*who is now near the door right*): Oh—he's here.

She draws back from door. SIR EDWARD FORTROSE enters, almost with a rush. He is about forty-seven, a personality but with nothing particularly handsome or distinguished about his appearance. He is rather grey, not so tanned as most of the other men and, while trying to hide it, gives the impression of being tired from overwork. He is carelessly dressed. His superficial manner is quick, light, easy, suggesting a certain type of un-donnish Oxford don, but behind this manner there are signs of a grave steadiness of purpose. At the moment he is more the host of a party than the administrator.

FORTROSE (*seeing SURREY first*): My dear chap, I'm so sorry. A Madwoman got hold of me—we have two or three here. Oh—Jill—I wondered where you were.

JILL: Do you want me to cope?

FORTROSE: Yes, my dear—but don't do it long—just get rid of 'em somehow. Oh—and tell old Karam to let us have a few drinks and bit to eat in here, will you? And whisky for Sir George, please.

JILL (*moving up right*): I've sent Nils Dayton for a specially big cold one.

FORTROSE: *Wonderful!* Let's hope that Austrian woman with the orange hair hasn't taken him prisoner. (*To SURREY as JILL goes.*) You'd imagine there wouldn't be any European freaks on this small remote island. But we have our quota—in fact, rather more than our

share. And it's all the same whether you invite them or not, they come to all parties.

ANN: Shall I tell the others to come along?

FORTROSE: No, they're coming. (*To SURREY.*) I think you've already met Miss Westfield, haven't you? But not officially—as a member of my staff.

SURREY: Oh—one of your UNUTO people, is she?

ANN (*smiling*): It sounds terrible, the way you say it. But that's just what I am.

FORTROSE (*brightly but not insincerely*): Ann's really my chief assistant, now that van Dahlen's left us. She's a New Englander and a sociologist, and she brings the New England conscience into our sessions and labours here. And the New England conscience is very fierce, let me tell you.

SURREY (*glancing at ANN*): Ah! Boston?

ANN: Near enough.

SURREY: Good! Prefer Boston to most American places.

As he says this, NILS DAYTON arrives hastily, triumphantly holding out large whisky and soda.

DAYTON (*boisterously*): What about California, Sir George?

SURREY (*taking drink*): Don't care for it much. Grateful for this, though. Thanks.

FORTROSE: Dayton, would you mind giving Jill a hand in getting rid of the crowd—or keeping 'em amused?

DAYTON (*moving*): Be glad to.

ANN (*as he passes, with marked irony*): Nice of you.

DAYTON (*stopping to give her a stare*): Might be—at that.

He goes out right.

SURREY: Not one of your staff, eh?

FORTROSE: No. Tourist. One of the playboys of the Western world.

ANN: I've just discovered he's a playboy who took a darned long hard course at Pasadena.

FORTROSE: Oh—that's where it was, eh? (*To SURREY.*) Miss Westfield doesn't like him, though he's a fellow-countryman of hers.

ANN: A Californian—with a Swedish mother. That puts him a long way from New England.

SURREY: Seems a pleasant fellow. What's wrong with him?

ANN: I don't like the shape of his head—or the look in his eyes. Something both hard and empty about him. And I don't trust him.

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FORTROSE (*smiling*): Feminine intuition, of course, not sociology. (To SURREY.) Our staff here is international, from all over the place—naturally——

SURREY: Yes—it's the curse of these United Nations agencies—have to put in so many foreigners. Well—cheers! (*Drinks.*)

FORTROSE: Cheers, my dear chap. Sure you need it.

ANN (*smiling*): Good clean drink?

SURREY (*smiling*): Exactly. And I *did* need that. Damned hot, isn't it? Though this is better than the other room. (*Mops himself a little.*)

FORTROSE: Not so many people. It's the people, not the climate that sends the temperature up. (LOUIS RIBERAC *arrives in doorway.*) Come in, Louis.

RIBERAC *comes in. He is French, in his early thirties, neat, graceful, with considerable charm. He is not masculine nor yet effeminate but has a curious sexless quality. His English is excellent but he has a not unpleasant French accent.*

This is Louis Riberac, who is our economic and financial adviser. Louis—this is Sir George Surrey, one of those deceptive and dangerous characters from His Majesty's Foreign Office.

SURREY: How do you do?

RIBERAC: Pleasure, Sir George. I have heard of you, of course.

SURREY: Have you? I'm rather surprised.

FORTROSE: Don't be. Louis knows everything——

ANN (*lightly but with a touch of sharpness*): And believes in nothing.

RIBERAC: No, at this hour I believe in Dry Martini or gin and Dubonnet. Can we not have a drink in here?

FORTROSE: I've asked for some to be sent in.

RIBERAC: I'm sorry if I sound greedy but as a matter of fact I have not yet had a drink. That terrible old Dutchman from Curacao took me at once into a corner and would not let me go.

FORTROSE: What's the old monster grumbling about now?

RIBERAC: The sexual morals of this island. Being a Frenchman it is probably all my fault. So first I apologised, and then when he would not stop and was more and more furious about it, I told him he is jealous of these boys and girls when he sees them hurrying into the bushes—just jealous. "Calm yourself, my friend," I said to him. "You are over-rating these pleasures. My own experience, which is far more recent——

ANN (*half joking, half serious*): Louis!

RIBERAC (*mockingly*): Ann! My dear Ann!

FORTROSE (*cheerfully*): Shut up, both of you.

SURREY (*staring at RIBERAC*): So you're the economic expert here, eh?

RIBERAC (*with touch of mockery*): Yes—and I am really not too bad——

FORTROSE: He's very good indeed.

RIBERAC (*to SURREY*): Would you like some statistics—coffee, bananas——?

SURREY (*hurriedly*): No thanks. Not my kind of thing. But the island's pretty prosperous, is it?

RIBERAC: Not yet. But of course it's not been properly developed. After all, aren't we the United Nations Undeveloped Territories Organisation? But sometimes we have an idea there may be some valuable minerals up in the hills to the north.

SURREY: Indeed?

ANN: I think Nils Dayton may have that idea too.

RIBERAC: Ah! That interests me very much, my dear Ann. You remember——

FORTROSE (*cutting in lightly but firmly*): Some other time, I think, Louis. And if it's really important, raise it at our next meeting here.

ANN: Not tomorrow, by the way, Louis. Day after tomorrow—in the morning.

SURREY (*to FORTROSE*): Don't stop them for me, y'know. I was quite interested.

FORTROSE (*smiling*): No, my dear chap, we wouldn't dream of boring you with our little island affairs. ✕

There is a moment's pause, in which FORTROSE smiles at SURREY, who stares at him unsmilingly with slightly raised eyebrows; and ANN and RIBERAC exchange glances. This awkward silence is broken by the rather noisy entrance of DR. MELNIK and PROFESSOR CHU. MELNIK, a Czech, is a burly man in his fifties, with a forceful dramatic manner. His English is fluent but has a marked Czech accent, and if necessary his dialogue can be modified slightly to suit this accent, which should be authentic. He is very carelessly, almost slovenly, dressed, yet quite clean in his person, like a good doctor.

PROFESSOR CHU is a small round Chinese, of indeterminate middle age. He wears large tortoiseshell spectacles. He is very trim. His English is precise, scholarly, but has the softened Chinese accent, which must be as authentic as possible. He is always smiling, showing excellent teeth, and laughs a great deal in the pleasant but rather meaningless Chinese fashion. He is a shrewd, much-

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travelled and learned Oriental, and must not be presented as a comic character. He is quite sober. But MELNIK, though not drunk, is feeling the effects of many drinks, and is sweating, loud, dramatic. They are followed in by KARAM, an oldish native servant, who is carrying a tray on which are various cocktails and some long drinks of the Planter's Punch type and some sandwiches and canapes.

Ah!—here you are. Dr. Melnik. Professor Chu. Sir George Surrey.

(They shake hands and murmur greetings, while FORTROSE, noting KARAM, who is hesitating with his tray, continues briskly.) Oh—Karam, put the things down there, will you, and then you can go and look after the rest of the party. Please take what you want, everybody. *(KARAM nods and smiles and puts down tray on a small table near the group. Then he goes, closing door right.)* Ann—do have something—an orange drink—a sandwich? Louis, now's your chance. Chu. Melnik?

MELNIK: I have had many drinks already.

FORTROSE: I'm sure you have, but have some more. Chu, look after Sir George.

FORTROSE picks up a plate, to offer it round, and takes a drink for himself. Throughout following dialogue there is some eating and drinking, all in character. MELNIK both eats and drinks greedily, CHU and ANN sparingly. RIBERAC drinks but does not eat. FORTROSE, while giving as host a brisk festive air to occasion, takes little himself. He can offer things or point, without interrupting dialogue; and ANN helps him as hostess.

CHU *(to SURREY)*: You do not make a long stay here?

SURREY: No, just passing through. On my way from South America to Washington and Lake Success. May be off again in the morning.

CHU *(smilingly)*: That will be very nice.

MELNIK: Why will it be very nice?

FORTROSE *(smiling)*: That's just politeness—a present from an old civilisation.

CHU *(to SURREY, smilingly)*: But it is very beautiful here. In the garden of my little bungalow I smell the orange groves on the hills, and the almond trees and the frangipani snow down their scented blossoms, and in the evening, when all is dark purple, I see the fire-flies dancing below on the sand. It is very beautiful.

SURREY: Yes—it must be.

CHU: To write little Chinese poems about it is easy. But to paint it in the Chinese way is difficult.

FORTROSE: Professor Chu was lent to us by UNESCO to look after our Fundamental Education here.

SURREY (*startled*): Good God! (*recovers himself hastily, turning to CHU*) I mean—what is this Fundamental Education?

CHU (*smiling*): Education from beginning—for undeveloped peoples. We teach them to write—so that they can make many complaints about faulty officials, especially Chinese officials. We teach them to read—so that they can take up newspapers and learn about all quarrels in the world and atom bomb and perhaps biological warfare. Then they are no longer ignorant peasants all quite happy.

He smiles at SURREY, who regards him with bewilderment. After a pause—

ANN (*indignantly*): You really shouldn't talk like that. It's bad enough when Louis does it—but there's no excuse for you. And Sir George will go away thinking we don't believe in the work we're doing here.

FORTROSE (*lightly but firmly*): Well he'd be wrong. We do.

CHU (*to both ANN and SURREY*): So sorry. Little joke.

RIBERAC: It did not sound like a joke to me.

ANN: Stop it, Louis! (*To SURREY, eagerly.*) Professor Chu and his whole Education Group have worked desperately hard and already they're producing wonderful results. If only—

FORTROSE (*cutting in*): No, not *if only*. They *are* producing wonderful results.

MELNIK (*boisterously*): And what about me? Am I not producing wonderful results too?

FORTROSE: Yes, of course you are.

MELNIK (*gloomily*): No, you are wrong. I am not. But we have more superstitious and reactionary practices to fight than they have even in Education.

FORTROSE (*to SURREY*): Dr. Melnik, who comes from Czechoslovakia, is head of our medical staff.

SURREY: Ah—yes. People fairly healthy here?

MELNIK (*dramatically*): Healthy? They look nice sometimes, eh? Pretty little girls—nice armfuls, eh? Brown men—black men—muscles shining in the sun—very fine—very æsthetic, eh? (*He makes startling derisive noise, right at the startled SIR GEORGE.*) I tell you, my friend, they crawl—they *stink*—with disease. Listen to me. You are in a medical museum—and all round you are glass jars where diseased or freak organs are nicely preserved in alcohol. Well then, you are drunk—or you are mad—then you see all these things come out of

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their jars to turn into people—and then you are here in Corabana, working for UNUTO.

SURREY (*embarrassed*): Humph! Bad as that, is it? *✓*

ANN: No, it isn't.

MELNIK (*who has had a drink and ignored all this*): How do I spend my time late at night, when the work for the day is at last finished?

FORTROSE (*lightly*): Drinking rum and playing your little brute of a gramophone.

MELNIK: Very well, I am drinking rum and listening to my poor little gramophone—(*he sketches himself huddled over a tiny machine*)—the string quartets of Beethoven, the clarinet quintet of Brahms, the music of Dvorak and Smetana—and what am I thinking? Am I dreaming of love and friendship in the Spring forests and lakes in the moonlight? Never, never! I am thinking how it would be possible to make the mass production of the Wassermann Test—fifty people at a time for Wassermann Test.

SURREY (*a little dazed by all this*): Got your work cut out here, eh?

MELNIK (*puzzled and indignant*): Cut out? No, it is not cut out. Who can cut it out?

CHU (*laughing*): No, no. English idiom—meaning all very difficult.

MELNIK: So—yes—it is very difficult. But why not? What kind of world is this we are living in? I will tell you, my friend. (*Here he stares fiercely at SURREY, who almost recoils.*) Not like British Foreign Office—eh, no, no, no! No nice office—little villa with garden—Oxford-Cambridge club—Dukes' cricket place—all very fine with wealth of old Empire. No, no, no! Most of this world is full of people who are hungry, who have disease and see children with disease, who are full of fear—what is to happen tomorrow—miserable, miserable people. Yet men, real men, like—like Beethoven, Smetana—women like—like Greta Garbo—or nice Miss Ann Westfield—

ANN (*laughing*): Who's just like Greta Garbo.

MELNIK (*ignoring this*): When British Foreign Office does something for all such people, I will like British Foreign Office very much. Until then—no, never!

SURREY: Oh!—I'm sorry you don't approve of us.

MELNIK: I am glad. I am also, I think, a little drunk. But—we work hard here. We begin to do something for such people—not much, but we make a beginning. Take that message, please, back to British Foreign Office. (*Suddenly shakes the astonished SURREY, warmly by the hand.*) I am damned glad to meet you, Sir Surrey. Good-bye.

He turns and begins to march out right.

RIBERAC (*moving*): I will see him through the party out there. .

FORTROSE: He's all right really—but one of you might keep an eye on him.

CHU (*also moving*): Allow me, please. (*To SURREY and FORTROSE.*) Excuse me.

RIBERAC and CHU *hurry out right, after MELNIK.*

SURREY: He's had a few drinks of course, but over and above that I'd say he was an unbalanced sort of chap, Fortrose.

FORTROSE (*dryly*): He worked three years in a concentration camp, which isn't quite the best training for what is called a balanced outlook. But he's a damn' good chap at his job.

SURREY: Communist?

FORTROSE (*lightly*): Might be.

ANN: Of course he is.

FORTROSE: Have another drink, Ann. (*As she shakes her head.*) Somebody must have something. What about another whisky and soda?

SURREY: No, thanks. Had my allowance.

Enter from left—ROSA OLACCA, a young half-caste Corabanian girl, pretty, neatly dressed. She is carrying a typed message.

FORTROSE *sees her as she comes in.*

FORTROSE (*gaily*): Ah—Rosa. Now here's another member of our staff—Miss Rosa Olacca.

SURREY (*without shaking hands as she is too far away*): How d'you do?

ROSA, *embarrassed, smiles and nods.*

FORTROSE: My own secretary—Miss Dodds—is on leave. You must know Miss Dodds—she came to us from the Foreign Office—

SURREY: Yes, I remember Miss Dodds. Tall thin girl—very superior—

FORTROSE: She's still tall and thin but probably less superior. But the point is—while Miss Dodds is on leave, Rosa here is acting as my secretary—and doing it very well, aren't you, Rosa?

ROSA (*confused*): I'm doing my best—sir. (*She speaks good English with just a trace of some exotic accent.*)

FORTROSE: Rosa's a Corabana girl, and we managed to get her a British Council scholarship, so she went to England and learned her shorthand and typing there. Now she's one of us—a good Unutonian—

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SURREY: A *what*? Oh—I see—Unuto—Unutonian. What terrible jargon you fellows have to use! (*Rosa has now handed the typed message to FORTROSE, who reads it. SURREY speaks to her as she waits.*) Did you like England?

ROSA (*shyly*): Yes, sir, very much, thank you.

SURREY: Where did they send you?

ROSA: Birmingham.

SURREY: Good Lord! And you liked Birmingham? *✓*

ROSA: Yes sir, though at first it seemed rather cold and dark. But it was exciting to see all the people and the big buildings—and the trams.

FORTROSE (*looking up*): Rosa loved the Birmingham trams. She's made me feel I ought to go and have another look at them. This is really your message—to say that your plane will take off as soon as it's light—say, about six. All right?

SURREY: Excellent. I suppose I can get some transport to the air-field?

FORTROSE: Yes, I'll fix that. In fact, I'll do it now.

He goes behind desk to telephone, and stands where the red flowers show vividly against his light coat. As he telephones, SURREY talks to ROSA.

SURREY: But you don't want to go back to Birmingham, eh?

ROSA (*shyly, carefully*): Only for a visit sometimes, sir, to see my friends. This is my home—and I think—(*she hesitates.*)

ANN (*encouragingly*): Go on, Rosa. Tell us.

ROSA: Well, I think UNUTO is trying to help our people—and it's much better here now than it was before UNUTO came.

SURREY (*more to ANN than to ROSA*): Let's see—this island originally belonged to Spain, didn't it?

ANN: Yes, then it revolted in Thirty-Nine and became a messy kind of independent republic, run by a bunch of racketeers. And then in Forty-One, for security reasons, our American Forces occupied it—

SURREY: Until the Undeveloped Territories Organisation took over. (*To ROSA.*) But don't tell me, young woman, that all your people here agree with you—I mean, about UNUTO.

ROSA: No, sir, a lot of them don't. Especially the older ones. My grandmother is always trying to stop me coming to work here. She wants me to marry an island boy, who won't let me alone—(*she breaks off, looking troubled.*)

ANN (*heartily*): I'll say he won't. And I'm sick and tired seeing him hanging about.

ROSA (*troubled*): It's not my fault.

ANN (*kindly*): I know it isn't. Don't worry. (*Sees that FORTROSE has now finished telephoning.*) Come along, Rosa. I've a job for you. Excuse me, Sir George.

ANN and ROSA go out left. SURREY looks at FORTROSE.

SURREY: All right?

FORTROSE (*coming down*): Yes, I've arranged for your transport. Everything's all set for the morning. (*He can here light a pipe or cigarette.*)

SURREY (*already sitting down*): Thanks—I'll leave you soon—turn in early. But I'd like a chat with you first.

FORTROSE (*sitting*): Good!

SURREY (*after pause, easily*): Very different here from the old Colonial Office—eh?

FORTROSE (*dryly at first, then expanding*): Very. We're quite a long way from Whitehall. And you have to live here to know how far. (*Pauses a moment.*) Out there—only a few hundred yards away—is darkness—primeval darkness—like the old Unconscious, full of vengeful gods, vampire goddesses, demons, ghosts. Here is a little lighted place, where consciousness exists, where—God help us—we try to see things clearly and for what they are. We have other little places—I could show you on the map there—just tiny outposts, with the huge ancient darkness all round them, threatening them all the time. I can only keep the steadiest fellows out there very long. The rest soon go queer if they're not relieved. The dark begins to seep through. They see and hear things they shouldn't see and hear. Even I sometimes—(*breaks off, shrugs his shoulders.*) No, we'll not bother about that.

SURREY (*looking hard at him*): You need some leave, don't you?

FORTROSE: Yes. It's overdue. But I hope to get away in two or three weeks. (*Changes tone.*) Now—that little typist girl—Rosa. She's a half-caste. Her family want her back in the hut, squatting over the stewpot. And they may get her yet, especially if some native lad can persuade her to go with him one night behind the oleanders. We fight here for Rosa and her kind, and she's helping us to do it.

He is interrupted by the entrance right of JILL. Both men stand.

JILL: Sorry to interrupt, darling. But two things. First, you did say you'd be working tonight, didn't you?

FORTROSE: Yes. I must. Why?

JILL: Well, Nils Dayton has just had a message that a yacht belonging to a friend of his has at last arrived, after being due in for days. And

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he's been asked to go out and dine on this yacht and wants me to go with him. 'That's all right, isn't it? It'll be heaven to be on the water after this sticky party.

FORTROSE: Of course it will. By the way, who owns the yacht?

JILL: Do sit down, Sir George. 'Oh—a very rich old gent called Lerma. I've never heard of him but Nils seems to know him quite well.

FORTROSE: I've heard of him. What's the other thing?

JILL: Everybody's gone now—except the wretched Merzheims, who insist upon having a word with you about some idiotic grievance they've cooked up. Could you go and see what it's all about, darling, and then tell them firmly to go? It won't take five minutes, and I can entertain Sir George.

FORTROSE: Certainly you can, but can I entertain the Merzheims? Or do I just push them out?

He goes out right. JILL sits down and smiles at SURREY.

JILL: I hope I didn't crash in on anything official?

SURREY: No, we hadn't quite come to that. Your husband was telling me about this little half-caste typist girl—Rosa Somebody. He was saying it's touch-and-go whether she turns native or clings to the twin ideals of Birmingham and UNUTO. He seems to think it important—but I don't quite see why.

JILL: Neither do I. Actually I prefer Corabana as it is—or as it would be if Edward and his gang of international busybodies would leave it alone.

SURREY (*obviously interested*): Ah—you do—do you?

JILL: I do, but I suppose I oughtn't to be telling you so.

SURREY: Why not?

JILL: Because Edward would hate it. He's very serious about his UNUTO.

SURREY: So I gather. And you—are not impressed, eh?

JILL: No. And I'd better leave it at that.

SURREY: Come on now. It won't go any further. Just between ourselves.

JILL (*after a pause, explosively*): I hate the whole thing. It's pretentious and damned silly. All this stuff about internationalism and a world society—it's nothing but empty talk—busybody nonsense.

SURREY: So you don't think much of this little lighted bit of civilisation against the primitive darkness outside—eh?

JILL: Edward's been giving you that, has he? Well, the answer is—no I don't. I'd rather have the darkness outside. At least it's real—it's

life—full of scents and sounds—with wind and rain and starlight. It responds to something in our heart and blood.

SURREY (*with a wave*): And this doesn't—um?

JILL (*with sharp contempt*): No. It's sterile, arid, lifeless. Sometimes I feel there's a kind of grey dustiness taking possession of Edward (*she breaks off as if she felt she had said too much. Then, with more vehemence*) What they're trying to make here will never be really alive. Only an imitation of something half-dead somewhere else. Surbiton in the tropics. No more dignified Indians and jolly lazy blacks and picturesque riffraff, enjoying their life in their own way. Instead—committees of pimply clerks and anæmic schoolteachers droning on about Education and Culture and the United Nations and Internationalism and Peace. If I knew you better I'd tell you what I thought about it all in one short word.

SURREY: Then I wish you did know me better. And I couldn't agree with you more. Nor be so eloquent.

JILL (*lighting a cigarette*): Sorry if I'm talking too much. It's that damned party—having to pretend and then taking one or two cock-tails too many to keep myself going. It's such a relief to say what I think.

SURREY: Go on, go on. Don't stop.

JILL (*rising, moving restlessly*): No, I'm talking too much. But I'll say this. I was brought up in a good old English country house, before taxation became downright robbery. That was a good life—perhaps the best there is. Done for now, I suppose.

SURREY: Just about—worse luck!

JILL: For all that—with the right sort of person I could exist quite cheerfully in one of these Port San Pedro waterfront slums or in a hut on the hills—just a good-tempered slut who didn't give a damn. Yes, I mean it, and I know what I'm talking about. But what I couldn't possibly do is to live a namby-pamby lower-middle-class suburban existence, stiff with third-hand culture and earnest idiotic committees and bloody-minded busybodies. And I just don't want Fundamental Education for natives and hygiene for everybody and a world society and UNO and UNESCO and UNUTO. I despise threequarters of it and absolutely loathe the rest. There—I've finished.

She looks at him almost angrily for a moment, then as their eyes meet they both suddenly laugh. She now sits down again, and he now looks serious.

SURREY (*quietly*): I'll be equally frank with you, Lady Fortrose. I think your husband is wasting his time here—and missing some valuable opportunities. We all know he's a very able administrator—

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with an easy but firm touch of his own—the kind of camouflaged leadership we badly need at home now—and if he's not careful, he'll find this UNUTO thing has collapsed under him and he has a bad failure on his hands.

JILL (*staring at him appraisingly*): You're cleverer than I thought.

SURREY: I have to be cleverer than people think.

JILL: Then you've probably guessed that behind this bogus-hearty Oxford tutor manner of his, Edward is horribly serious about his United Nations Undeveloped Territories Organisation—I just won't say that foul word UNUTO again tonight.

SURREY (*very quietly*): How much influence have you with him?

JILL (*also quietly*): I've been waiting for that question. And now if I'm going to answer it—and it's damned cheek of you to ask me—I really have to be frank with you. Can I trust you?

SURREY: No.

JILL: Then I will.

SURREY: It isn't personal curiosity, you know.

JILL: I didn't think it was. Well, Edward's still devoted to me in his own curious kind of way. If I was equally devoted to him, then I might be able to answer your question as you'd like it answered. But I'm not. You're too late. It's possible that soon—quite soon—(*she breaks off, with a glance towards door left.*)

SURREY: Yes? (*But she shakes her head, and, understanding now, he continues in rather louder, more social tone.*) If I hadn't felt so tired, I'd have liked to have joined you on that yacht. But I shall turn in.

JILL (*same tone as his*): No dinner?

As FORTROSE now enters left.

SURREY: Not even any dinner. Don't feel like it.

JILL rises, clearly in a hurry to go now. SURREY gets up too.

FORTROSE: I'd practically to carry the Merzheims to the door. Thank God they're leaving the island next week. Going, Jill?

JILL: Yes, I must fly. (*To SURREY, holding out her hand.*) Good-bye, Sir George—I'm sorry you have to leave us so soon.

SURREY: I know—nuisance, isn't it? Still—we had some talk. Good-bye then——

They shake hands and JILL then hurries straight out left.

FORTROSE (*looking after her*): Strange how most women really hate the sea and yet have a passion for yachts. I suppose that explains why all these rich old lechers go in for yachts. Have a drink?

SURREY: No, thanks. Just want a quiet word or two with you, then

I'll be off. Dog tired. Can't rest properly on these long plane journeys. (*Sits.*)

FORTROSE: Neither can I. Secretly, I suppose, I'm just terrified. (*Pokes about on tray for a sandwich.*)

SURREY (*obviously opening his talk*): How are things going here?

FORTROSE: Rather well really. We've two groups dead against us. One's educational and cultural, so to speak—Rosa's grandmother and her witch-doctor pals against Melnik and the Wassermann Test. The other's economic and political—the gang of toughs who were running the island and have had their racket ruined. Luckily for us, the toughest of the toughs, a kind of quadroon Hitler, had to leave the island and——

SURREY: Who's that?

FORTROSE: Vezabar. One of the leaders in their revolt against the Spanish. I've never met him, but I gather he's able in his own way and a very unpleasant type. I don't say he could tip the balance against us, unless he had outside help, but I'm glad he's not here to try.

SURREY (*carefully*): I see. Well, I gather—and I'll know more about it in a day or two—that certain representations have been made to the State Department in Washington about some of these undeveloped territories now controlled by your organisation. At the same time some of us at the Foreign Office have been having some discussions with the Colonial Office—and we feel that we agreed to this UNUTO control rather hastily—it was when the Minister was running the United Nations rather hard, you remember—and perhaps we agreed without entirely envisaging——

FORTROSE (*cutting in, firmly*): Let's use plain words, Surrey. The public isn't listening. You'd like some undeveloped territories back and you're ready to do a deal with Washington, where they have similar ideas. About this island possibly?

SURREY: I've heard nothing about Corabana—yet. Not worth bothering about, probably. (*Pause.*) That young American—Dayton—what's he doing here? Just amusing himself?

FORTROSE (*rather grimly*): He does that in his spare time, chiefly in Jill's company. But he also happens to be an expert mineralogist, who disappeared for days into the hills in the north of the island. I know rather more about him than he thinks I do.

SURREY (*carefully*): If things got difficult here, and you reported unfavourably in good time, and Washington had to take over again, we could do the same elsewhere—and we could explain at Lake Success that the UNUTO idea, as we warned them at first, was too premature. In that case, well, nobody would blame you—and if you

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didn't want to return to the Colonial Office then something else could be found for you——

FORTROSE (*cutting in, rather harshly and rising*): Don't say any more. It's only fair to warn you.

Enter ANN left.

ANN: Oh—I'm sorry. But there's an important message come through from the North Section.

FORTROSE: In about ten minutes, Ann, please.

She goes out left.

SURREY: I don't quite understand your attitude, Fortrose. I'm not usually considered indiscreet. I was suggesting what our policy might be, chiefly for your own personal guidance. And I see no harm in indicating the broad lines of official British policy to a British Civil Servant.

FORTROSE: But I'm not a British Civil Servant. I stopped being one two years ago when I accepted this job with UNUTO.

SURREY (*with touch of contempt*): My dear chap—what's UNUTO? Here today and gone tomorrow.

FORTROSE: We shall most of us be here today and gone tomorrow unless we can make these United Nations agencies work. It's our only chance——

SURREY (*rather impatiently*): Well, we won't argue about that——

FORTROSE: No, we won't. (*Pause.*) I'd like to tell you about a little ceremony here this morning. It often happens. In fact, every time there's a new arrival on our staff. This morning there were two. A young Norwegian educationalist who's gone to one of Chu's remoter schools. And a young Indian doctor who'll work under Melnik. A Norwegian with a Chinese, an Indian with a Czech, all on a Caribbean island. The beginning of a new world. I reminded these two youngsters, though they didn't really need it, that now they were servants of an international order, new kinds of men, and then they read out and signed—(*going to desk as he says this*) the usual Declaration. Here it is, Surrey. Listen. (*Reads carefully but not too solemnly.*)

“I solemnly undertake to exercise in all loyalty and discretion the functions entrusted to me as a member of the staff of the Organisation, to discharge these functions and regulate my conduct with its interests alone in view, and not to seek or accept from any government or other authority external to the Organisation any instructions in regard to the performance of my official duties.”

How could I ask those youngsters to read and sign that Declaration, and then listen to you? While the United Nations Organisation exists and I'm its servant, then I work for it and fight for it and for nobody else.

SURREY: And go down with it too?

FORTROSE: Yes, but there wouldn't be anything specially heroic about that. Most of us would go down then. And if I have to go down, I'd rather go down with the lifeboat than with the wreckers. (*Enter ROSA left.*) Rosa—you ought to have gone home.

ROSA (*embarrassed*): No—it's all right, thank you, sir. I said I didn't mind doing late duty tonight.

FORTROSE: Well don't overdo it. And tell Miss Westfield to come in and wait for me. And then open this room a bit and clear the air, and make that desk look a little more like business and less like debauchery.

ROSA (*smiling*): Yes, sir.

As she goes, FORTROSE turns to SURREY, who is standing, ready to go.

FORTROSE: Come along, my dear chap, and I'll see if you've everything you want.

SURREY (*moving slowly*): Oh—you needn't bother—especially if you're busy.

FORTROSE (*moving with him now*): We're always busy here. But Jill's probably gone off to her yacht, and besides, we haven't had any gossip yet. Old Egerton—for instance—what's the latest?

They are now out of door right. After a moment, ANN enters left, carrying some papers, with ROSA following. As ANN stares thoughtfully at her papers, ROSA takes some glasses and a plate from desk and tray on small table.

RIBERAC *now enters right. He holds himself well but nevertheless is rather tight.*

RIBERAC: Ann—sweet Ann—Edward just told me there is an important message. He is about to restore his distinguished fellow-countryman, Sir George, to his glass case, before sending him back to the British Museum. (*ROSA, who is now opening windows or doors at back, suddenly giggles.*) Rosa! Rosa!

ANN (*reproachfully*): Louis! I believe—

RIBERAC: No—but Melnik gave me some of his rum. I think there is ether in that rum. But what is this important message?

ANN: Wait.

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RIBERAC (*teasingly*): Rosa, my darling—what are your cultural activities at present? Are you reading Tennyson or Wordsworth?

ROSA (*shyly*): No, Mr. Riberac. I am reading Shelley now.

RIBERAC: Shelley? Oh—you must be careful. Dangerous poet. Not a good British Council type at all.

ROSA (*looking at him shyly, adoringly*): Please—Mr. Riberac—you mustn't tease me.

ANN: All right, Rosa. And listen for the bell. We may want you again soon. (ROSA *nods and goes*. ANN *looks with serious reproach at RIBERAC*.) You mustn't tease that poor child, Louis. Don't you realise she's crazy about you? Really in love—it's pathetic.

RIBERAC (*wildly, bitterly*): Love—love—yes, it's pathetic. Nearly everyone here is in love with somebody else who is in love with somebody else. Little Rosa with me, as you say. Edward with his Jill, who is in love with whoever she happens to be sleeping with——

ANN: Shut up, Louis——

RIBERAC: And you, poor Ann, with our noble Edward——

ANN (*furious*): You devil—be quiet. (*She glares at him, and he shrugs and smiles.*)

RIBERAC (*apologetically*): I am sorry, my dear Ann. I did not want to hurt your feelings.

ANN (*softly*): You wouldn't know what love means.

RIBERAC (*gravely*): Not any more. Once. There was a man—there was a girl—I loved them both. We were all in the Resistance together.

ANN: What became of them?

RIBERAC: The Gestapo—and then they disappeared. They have not even any graves. They are merely dust blowing about the ruins of Western Europe, of civilisation. Ann, it is you who do not know what anything means—only in books and the *Atlantic Monthly*. You do not know what it is to be hollow inside—with Dr. Goebbels still whispering there. So that you wonder if they did not win after all. And wonder sometimes if you did not die too, for often now I seem to have no real existence. (*More lightly.*) That is why so many of us Europeans are existentialists, in spite of the fact that it is really a Nazi Occupation philosophy. It tells us we exist. How wonderful!

ANN (*sympathetically, impulsively*): Louis—this just means—that I'm sorry.

She kisses him lightly on the cheek. Suddenly overcome, he seizes both her hands and bending forward presses his forehead against them.

FORTROSE (*staring at her*): All right. I was only going to venture a comradely pat.

ANN (*half angry, half emotional*): I don't want a comradely pat. No woman ever wants a comradely pat. Either take hold of us or leave us alone.

FORTROSE: I was hoping to depend upon you more than ever now.

ANN: That's the point. Can't you see? If I'd known we'd find ourselves in trouble so soon——

FORTROSE: You wouldn't have asked for the transfer. Well, there's nothing to worry about. MacDowell will probably ask me. As a matter of fact, you ought to have asked me.

ANN: I know, but I couldn't. And I told MacDowell you hadn't to be brought into it.

FORTROSE: But I have to be brought into it. Unless you feel you can't work with me any longer, and if so then you ought to have talked to me first before you wrote to MacDowell. I don't like this, Ann——

ANN (*staring up at him sombrely*): I don't like it either—any of it.

As they are staring at each other, JILL enters briskly right. She is wearing another dress, but looks equally charming.

JILL (*brightly*): I hope I'm not interrupting anything very important——

FORTROSE (*swinging round, embarrassed*): No—we were just——

JILL: The point is, Nils Dayton has just arrived with his friend Mr. Lerma, who's anxious to meet you.

FORTROSE: And I'm rather anxious to meet him.

JILL (*coming in as FORTROSE begins to move*): I left them on the veranda. Bring Mr. Lerma in here. And tell Nils I'll join him in a minute.

By the time she has said this, FORTROSE has gone out right. ANN has now risen, and the two women look at each other.

ANN: Well?

JILL: There seems to be a lot of emotion in the air here. What's it all about?

ANN: I nearly told him. I wish I had now.

JILL (*coolly*): Told him what?

ANN: That I can't endure it here any longer—because——

JILL: You want him so badly.

ANN (*angrily, but not loud*): Because I hate to see him wasting himself on a woman like you.

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JILL: Perhaps he doesn't know he's wasting himself. In fact, I'm sure he doesn't.

ANN (*urgently*): You don't even try——

JILL (*coolly*): I'd stop now if I were you. I'm not annoyed. The trouble is—that as they can't teach these things in colleges, you don't know what you're talking about. Why don't you take the man yourself and have done with it? At least you'd learn *something*.

ANN: You make me sick.

JILL: Nonsense! It's life that makes you sick. You only want to read about it, not live it.

ANN: Those other two were bad enough——

JILL: Oh—you knew about them, did you? But then I suppose everybody did.

ANN: But Dayton——

JILL (*cheerfully*): He might be rather a brute, eh?

ANN (*scornfully*): You ought to know.

JILL: Actually I don't. I'm not his mistress, you know, though you all think I am. So far—for once—I've kept him at a fair distance, though it's been hard work and of course it can't last. Not intended to. I must make up my mind one way or the other—soon. I shall tell Edward myself, so, for your own sake, don't you rush in and tell him, because if his pride is hurt then he'll also dislike you for helping to hurt it. Whereas, if you say nothing, look innocent and startled if he confides in you, then anything might happen. By the way, I hear that poor old UNUTO is having some trouble?

ANN (*bitterly*): I suppose you're delighted.

JILL: Certainly. The sooner you're all back home, not doing good any more, the better I'll be pleased.

She swings round as FORTROSE enters right with LERMA. The latter is an elderly Latin-American, slight, rather frail, with thin brown face, thick white hair and a gentle fastidious voice and manner. He is thus totally unlike the popular conception of the big capitalist. He is in yachting clothes of a conservative type. He smiles at JILL, who raises her voice cheerfully.

I'm just saying that the sooner all these UNUTO people go home and stop doing good to the world, the better I'll be pleased.

FORTROSE: My dear, Mr. Lerma may not understand your particular brand of humour.

ANN (*sharply*): I wish I didn't.

She makes a quick determined exit left.

JILL (*amused*): Lord help us—how that dreary young woman hates me!

FORTROSE (*sharply*): No, Jill——

He gives her a quick look and she raises her eyebrows at him.

LERMA, *a tactful man, smoothly intervenes.*

LERMA (*to JILL*): You and Nils, I think, are lunching with me on my little yacht.

JILL: Yes. Lovely. And don't call it little. (*To FORTROSE.*) You ought to see it, Edward. Palatial—that's the word, isn't it?

LERMA (*turning to FORTROSE*): But why don't you? Why not join us for lunch, Sir Edward?

FORTROSE: Wish I could. But I must grab a quick bite here and then dash up to the north of the island, where we've been having a little trouble.

JILL: Nils and I will be waiting for you on the veranda, Mr. Lerma. (*Exit.*)

FORTROSE (*indicating arm-chair*): I think that's fairly comfortable.

LERMA (*sitting down*): Thank you.

FORTROSE: Cigar—or cigarettes——?

LERMA (*delicately*): No thank you. I gave up smoking many years ago. It spoils the palate not only for wine but for good food also.

FORTROSE (*lighting a pipe or cigarette*): For the sort of food and wine I've had these last few years, you need a spoilt palate.

LERMA (*smiling*): Ah—yes. But some of us have been more fortunate. You enjoy the good things of life, though?

FORTROSE: Very much. When I can get at 'em. I'm no ascetic, if that's what you mean.

LERMA (*with soft precision*): I am myself something of a *gourmet*, though I eat and drink little these days. But it must be—the best that can be obtained. It is the same with my pictures.

FORTROSE: Ah—yes—you were going to tell me about your pictures.

LERMA: I have a few worth seeing in my little apartment in New York but the best are in my villa at Guernavaca. Do you know Guernavaca—it is not far from Mexico City?

FORTROSE: No, but I've heard of it. Some of the old Capri gang are now there, aren't they?

LERMA: Possibly. It's quite a little centre—and I have a charming villa. My collection there is not large, but I flatter myself it has been put together not without a certain taste. Some of the best Matisse.

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Picasso of the middle period. Modigliani. Marie de Laurencin. Derain. Rouault. And the Impressionists, of course. And some of the best work of our Latin-American painters, unknown to you probably, Sir Edward, but not to be despised.

FORTROSE: I wouldn't think of despising them. It sounds a wonderful collection.

LERMA: I hope I shall have the pleasure, one day, of showing it to you—and to Lady Fortrose, who is—if you'll allow me to say so, as charming and witty as she is beautiful. Ah! (*he sighs.*) This is a very unpleasant world, my dear Sir Edward.

FORTROSE: Parts of it are.

LERMA: Most of it. But to acquire a few exquisite choice things—to retire with those things into some green and sunny place, far away from the squalor of industry and the sordid cares of business—then occasionally to show these beautiful things to a few well-chosen friends—well, that seems to me as much happiness as a man can expect in this world.

FORTROSE (*not aggressively*): And a great deal more than most people get, of course. Though there are other ways of being happy quite different from all this exquisite tasting and retiring and connoisseurship with the chosen few.

LERMA: Ah—but then you are still young—comparatively. And at your age there is still the enjoyment—of power.

FORTROSE: No doubt. Forgive my curiosity, but aren't you, among other things, the president of a very formidable corporation known as Pan-American Alloys?

LERMA: I am. And rather a lazy President, these days.

FORTROSE: With that—and other things—you must know something about power.

LERMA (*smiling*): Enough not to care very much about it and longer. Providing, of course, that I can live the kind of life I prefer. Naturally I insist upon that.

FORTROSE: Naturally, not many people can do that, can they?

LERMA: Not many people really want anything much better than what they have got. There I would agree with Lady Fortrose and, I imagine, would disagree with you, my dear Sir Edward.

FORTROSE: My dear Mr. Lerma, it's only my politeness, such as it is, and my sense of the short space of time at our disposal, that prevent my disagreeing with you very sharply indeed.

LERMA (*laughing softly*): Quite so. But I am glad you have heard of Pan-American Alloys.

FORTROSE: That's not surprising. But why are you glad?

LERMA (*slowly*): I have a suggestion to make. But first let me tell you a secret. And this is to show how frank I am being with you. Here is my little secret. Those of us who are responsible for such large enterprises as Pan-American Alloys—we are often called Big Business—are worried, really anxious, because now there seems to be a disturbing shortage of genuine executive ability in the world. We can fill our less important posts easily enough, but not our more important and responsible ones. And the truth is, we need men like you.

FORTROSE (*astonished*): Mr. Lerma, you astonish me.

LERMA: But why? You are a well-trained and experienced administrator. You are not afraid of responsibility. I know a good deal about you. I had a report on your record, and have also had some talk with Lady Fortrose.

FORTROSE: The devil you have!

LERMA: The United Nations Undeveloped Territories Organisation pays you twelve thousand dollars a year—tax-free, of course—plus a personal allowance. You can join Pan-American Alloys next month and start at thirty-five thousand dollars a year, plus an expense allowance and a bonus.

FORTROSE: Good Lord! For doing what?

LERMA: I would suggest, as a beginning, acting as head of our personnel department. After that—well, we are a very large organisation. We are also a very secure organisation. Infinitely more secure as an employer, Sir Edward, than your UNUTO. In fact—UNUTO—well—(*he shrugs*.)

FORTROSE (*quietly*): Tell me about UNUTO, Mr. Lerma.

LERMA: I am no politician. And these days you can hardly call me an active business man—just——

FORTROSE: I know. Just a lover of beautiful things—and a yacht-owner. But what have you heard about UNUTO?

LERMA: I happened to be in Washington a few weeks ago, and heard rumours there that the UNUTO experiment was not thought, in official circles, to be succeeding—too premature perhaps. So that—well, anything might happen. And nobody is saying that about Pan-American Alloys.

FORTROSE: Not if they want to keep on living the Pan-American way of life, they aren't.

LERMA: One other point. You would not have to remain in this part of the world. And I gather from Lady Fortrose that you do not like the tropics.

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FORTROSE: Not much—no.

LERMA: May I ask—what type of country most appeals to you?

FORTROSE (*more for his own benefit than LERMA'S*): I sit here—or go out and stare at the bougainvillæas or the poinsettias or at the dazzling blue sea—eating my heart out for the sight again of a green English fell and a grey stone wall—Home! (*He pauses a moment.*) In less than three weeks I am due for leave—to go home—to go home . . . (*he recovers himself, adding in ordinary tone.*) That is, if the situation here allows me to go.

LERMA: And yet, feeling this—like a poet——

FORTROSE (*lightly*): Like some poets. We have a kind now that sit in Ritz bars and write like melancholy solicitors.

LERMA: Feeling such homesickness—that is the word, isn't it?—still—you stay here—for twelve thousand dollars a year——

FORTROSE (*rather lightly*): A new world—and we must have one or we may not even enjoy long what's left of the old world—must have a new kind of man to serve it. I don't count myself a very good specimen. But I feel it's worth trying—in fact, so far as I'm concerned, the only thing worth trying.

LERMA: You are not refusing my offer?

FORTROSE: At the risk of sounding rude—I'm not even considering it. (*Glancing at him sharply.*) But I can't believe you were serious.

LERMA: Certainly I was—and still am. (*He rises.*) Sir Edward, if you are a wise man, you will consider this offer very carefully. And there is not much time.

FORTROSE (*also standing*): Why isn't there much time?

LERMA: Because—(*breaks off, smiles, then continues in lighter tone*) I hope to sail tomorrow. In two weeks I shall return for a day or two, and that might be your last chance.

FORTROSE (*cheerfully*): I have an idea that you were about to give me some other reason—and then suddenly changed your mind.

LERMA (*smiling, moving slowly nearer door right*): I am hoping you will change your mind too.

FORTROSE (*moving forward to halt him*): By the way—just one question.

LERMA (*still now, still smiling*): Yes of course.

FORTROSE: Vezabar.

LERMA: Yes?

FORTROSE: Did he—by any chance arrive here in your yacht?

LERMA: He did.

FORTROSE: A friend of yours?

LERMA: Not exactly an old acquaintance.

FORTROSE: Where did you run across him again?

LERMA: At Vera Cruz.

FORTROSE: And he asked for a passage?

LERMA: Yes, and I could hardly refuse.

FORTROSE: Probably not. But why was he landed so secretly on the north of the island?

LERMA: But, my dear Sir Edward, there is nothing secret about it. He explained that he has a small property near the North Coast—at Santa Rosa, I think he said—and as he wanted to see it as soon as possible, I agreed to have him taken ashore near there. Why not? We may not admire the type. But he is not a criminal.

FORTROSE: Isn't he?

LERMA: His papers are all in order. And—perhaps I ought to add—*(he looks hard at FORTROSE as he says this)* he is not without influence either here or elsewhere. The man himself—

But he is interrupted by the arrival of RIBERAC at door right. He hesitates as he sees LERMA, who turns.

RIBERAC: Oh—I am sorry.

FORTROSE: No, Louis—come in. Mr. Lerma—this is Monsieur Louis Riberac—our financial and economic expert.

LERMA: How do you do? I am interested in these subjects—

RIBERAC: Yes, I know you are.

LERMA *(rather slowly, with a smile)*: And of course in UNUTO. I must leave tomorrow, so perhaps you could come out to my yacht this evening for an aperitif.

RIBERAC: Thank you, it will be a great pleasure.

LERMA: About six-thirty then. I will send the launch.

As LERMA moves towards door right, FORTROSE moves with him and addresses RIBERAC, who has now moved in, as he goes.

FORTROSE: Wait, Louis. And ring for Rosa, will you?

RIBERAC nods, and the other two go out right. RIBERAC rings bell on desk, then lights a cigarette and stares thoughtfully at door right, clearly thinking about LERMA. ROSA, after a moment or two, enters quietly left with notebook and pencil. He does not know she is there at first, and she looks at him adoringly and with longing. Then he turns and sees she is there.

RIBERAC: Sir Edward asked me to ring for you. He is coming back in a minute.

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ROSA (*shyly*): Yes, Mr. Riberac.

He looks at her steadily. She glances at him, then stands with downcast eyes. Then he takes from his pocket a little gold brooch.

RIBERAC: Hold out your hand, Rosa. (*Hesitating a little, ROSA holds out her hand, looking at him wonderingly. He speaks softly now.*) This is for you, Rosa. A little present. It belonged to my sister. Take it, please. (*He puts it into her hand.*)

ROSA (*flustered*): Oh—but—Mr. Riberac—I can't—

RIBERAC: Of course you can. It is charming, isn't it? You like it?

ROSA (*looking from brooch to him*): Oh—yes—it's lovely. I've never had anything like this—

RIBERAC: Then please keep it. And wear it often. Wear it now. Allow me.

He takes the brooch and pins it on. She is wide-eyed and happy. When the brooch is on, and before he can take his hand away, she seizes his hand and kisses it passionately.

RIBERAC: No, Rosa.

ROSA (*breathless*): I wanted—to thank you—

RIBERAC (*gently*): I know. But—my dear Rosa—this is really a little good-bye present.

ROSA (*alarmed*): You are leaving?

RIBERAC: I am not going from here—no. But I must go from your thoughts, Rosa. (*She shakes her head furiously.*) I am the wrong man. It is a waste of love.

ROSA (*sadly*): Because I am only—an island girl.

RIBERAC: No—no—no. What is wrong with being an island girl? You are everything that is young and delicious, my dear Rosa.

ROSA: Then why—why——? (*She is ready to cry now.*)

RIBERAC: It is not you who are wrong for this love affair. You are perfect for it. No, it is I who am all wrong, and that is why you must stop thinking about me. I am old—old—

ROSA (*crying a little*): No, you are quite young. Only thirty-three—

RIBERAC: That is what they write on the official forms—thirty-three. But really I am a thousand years old. And I am no longer a man nor yet a woman. I am a ghost. You cannot love a ghost. It is a terrible waste. There is nothing there—no sex—no heart—nothing you could enjoy. Only a little clear sad intelligence—and memories of other people and of dead lives—nothing—nothing for a girl. It would be like pouring your rich blood into an ash heap.

ROSA (*crying quietly*): I don't understand you——

She turns away to cry. FORTROSE now enters right and takes in the situation.

FORTROSE: All right, Rosa. Come back in about two minutes. (*She goes out quickly left. FORTROSE turns on RIBERAC, annoyed.*) What the devil are you up to with that child, Louis?

RIBERAC: Not what you imagine. I was making beautiful sad speeches to her but she did not understand.

FORTROSE: Well, I wish you'd leave her alone—or make your beautiful speeches after working hours. You went to see the shipping people, didn't you?

RIBERAC (*businesslike now*): Yes—and we can have space up to a thousand tons a month to New Orleans. But Buenos Aires will be more difficult to arrange. I will have a full report ready for our next meeting.

FORTROSE (*at desk now*): Good. Anything else?

RIBERAC: No. (*Hesitates.*) Except——

FORTROSE: Yes?

RIBERAC: You did not object to my accepting Lerma's invitation for this evening?

FORTROSE: No, of course not. You ought to enjoy yourself. An exquisite old taster of life, this Mr. Lerma, enjoying delicate sensations, well away from the crowd, in the middle of an iron ring of money and machine-guns.

RIBERAC: You do not like him?

FORTROSE: A poisonous old party. Very clever and, I'd say, completely ruthless. So be careful what you say to him.

RIBERAC: Of course.

FORTROSE (*thoughtfully*): Everything points now to a deliberate plan to wreck UNUTO. I fancy Lerma's in it up to his neck and wants us out of this island—he even offered me a job to get me out—although what there is for him and Pan-American Alloys I can't imagine.

ROSA *now enters left, looking composed again.*

RIBERAC (*slowly*): I will try to find out. I think Dayton discovered something up in those hills.

FORTROSE (*who is playing with a small shaped paperweight, apparently made of something like green glass—throwing it up a few inches and catching it*): Possibly. But the Spaniards, when they were here, ransacked those hills pretty thoroughly.

RIBERAC: For gold, silver, copper—yes. But now there are other things equally valuable.

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ROSA (*indicating paperweight*): Excuse me, sir——

FORTROSE: Yes, Rosa?

ROSA (*shyly*): What is that made of? Because—there is a lot of it in the hills, my uncle used to say. He used to carve it—like that.

FORTROSE (*examining paperweight*): I don't know what it is. Imagined it to be some kind of glass. Here, Louis. (*He throws it and RIBERAC catches it.*) Do you know what it is?

RIBERAC (*looking at it*): No. But I have often seen this material here.

FORTROSE: Well, try and find out what it is. But don't ask Mr. Lerma.

RIBERAC: Of course not. I shall try to make him talk. Perhaps he will offer me a job too. I will do the shipping report now.

Smiles and goes out left.

FORTROSE (*to ROSA, who has notebook ready*): Cable to MacDowell, UNUTO, Washington—Situation developing here please call me late tonight stop Check any lobbying Pan-American Alloys. (*She takes it down. He waits a moment, thinking.*) Cable to Professor Farley, Trinity College, Cambridge, England—What is substance like heavy glass or coarse emerald found in hills here and if possible suggest value and uses stop Looks like no Esk Hause——

ROSA (*puzzled*): Esk Hause?

FORTROSE: E.S.K. H.A.U.S.E.—it's a place in the Lake District that Professor Farley and I know very well. Got it? Looks like no Esk Hause for me this year though am still hoping Bless you—Fortrose, UNUTO, Corabana. And send that reply paid. (*KARAM has now appeared in doorway right. He looks frightened.*) Yes, Karam—what is it?

KARAM (*stepping forward, hoarsely*): Senor Vezabar—here.

ROSA *gives a startled exclamation.*

FORTROSE (*coolly*): Well, that mightn't be a bad idea. Show him in, Karam.

KARAM *goes.*

ROSA (*softly, disturbed*): He is a bad man. Shall I go now, please, sir?

FORTROSE (*quietly*): Not yet. Stand there—with your notebook. I want to see how he takes you. But get those cables off as soon as you do go.

A moment's pause, then VEZABAR enters right. He is a powerfully built middle-aged Spanish-Indian. His left shoulder is higher than his right, and his left leg is rather stiff, so that he walks with a slight

limp. He is somewhat gaudily dressed. He speaks with a guttural Spanish-cum-American accent. He has a powerful deep voice and is a formidable type. But though a menacing figure, he must be played solidly in character and not given any melodramatic tricks of voice and manner. He does not wear or carry a hat. He marches straight in, easy and confident, moving straight across towards desk.

VEZABAR: Vezabar.

FORTROSE: And I'm Sir Edward Fortrose.

VEZABAR: Yes—I know. (*Looks insolently at ROSA, who is clearly uncomfortable in his presence.*) Island girl?

FORTROSE (*not without touch of humour*): Yes. Now on our staff—Miss Rosa Olacca. Senor Vezabar.

ROSA (*nervously*): How d'you do.

VEZABAR (*grimly*): I spik English also. (*With sudden ferocity.*) Get out!

ROSA *starts back.*

FORTROSE (*sharply*): Stay where you are, Rosa. (*He comes from behind desk on right side, and there is hardly room for him to pass with VEZABAR standing there.*) Excuse me. (*VEZABAR rather reluctantly has to step back a pace or two. FORTROSE is now in front of desk.*) Not a very happy beginning, senor. This is my room, and Miss Olacca is a member of my staff and so doesn't take orders from you—not even polite ones.

VEZABAR (*shrugging*): Know 'er family. I am angry—okay. Why? I don't like to see Corabana girl officer clurk for UNUTO. Island girl should stay home—have babies.

FORTROSE: When she decides to stay at home and have babies, we shall do nothing to stop her. But she's young yet. All right, Rosa, you can go now. (*ROSA goes out left. FORTROSE turns to VEZABAR.*) Sit down, won't you? (*VEZABAR sits in largest arm-chair, sprawling a little, and lights a cigarette. FORTROSE also sits down. This happens during rest of speech.*) I'm very glad you've come to see us. I'd heard you were back on the Island, and there are several things I want to discuss with you.

VEZABAR: Corabana is my home. I 'ave many relations an' friends here. Some property also. Once I was minister—important man—big shot.

FORTROSE: I know all about that.

VEZABAR: Yes—yes. But Corabana is not your home. You 'ave no relations, no friends, no property here. You are English noble-

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FORTROSE: English nobleman? Certainly not. My father was a doctor in Stockport—but never mind about that. I used to be an English Civil Servant. Now I'm an international Civil Servant, and I'm here because the United Nations sent me here.

VEZABAR: How much longer you t'ink you stay here?

FORTROSE (*rather sharply*): Until I'm instructed to leave.

VEZABAR (*grinning*): Not long, I t'ink. That's why I come back. To be ready for changes. I am no fool. I am smart.

FORTROSE (*earnestly*): Then I want you to listen to me—carefully—for a minute or two, Mr. Vezabar. Will you?

VEZABAR: Sure! Costs me not'ing. (*He gives a loud laugh at this. FORTROSE does not even smile but looks steadily at him.*)

FORTROSE (*same earnest tone*): I know something about you. I think you have had very bad luck, and have some reason to feel bitter. When you were a child—and ought to have been at school—you were sent to work in one of the plantation mills. There was an accident and your arm and your leg were permanently injured——

VEZABAR (*angrily*): We do not talk of dis. I am now a strong man—very strong——

FORTROSE: No doubt. But that's what happened. Then afterwards you lost a young wife and a baby——

VEZABAR (*jumping up, very angry*): No one can talk dis way to me. I 'ave suffered very much—but it is all finished now——

FORTROSE (*with authority*): Please sit down. I'm not going to say anything more about your misfortunes. You had bad luck and I'm sorry. (*VEZABAR reluctantly sits down again.*) What I want to point out is this. Those things needn't have happened, and wouldn't have happened if this island had been decently governed. And we're here to see that such things don't happen again—that boys aren't sent to work with rotten machinery, that young mothers and babies have proper medical care. Now—remembering what you suffered—will you help us?

VEZABAR: No, why should I 'elp you? All dat is done wit'. All right—okay—I 'ad bad luck—but now I am Vezabar. Yes—an' wit' many frien's in Corabana an' odder places. I come 'ome to mind my business. You go 'ome to mind your business. Why you sit 'ere—in my Corabana—talkin' to me of my arm an' leg, my wife an' baby (*Angrily, shouting.*) Yes—why—why—why? Dis is our Corabana—not yours. We do t'ings our own way in our own place.

FORTROSE (*patiently*): Stop shouting. UNUTO (*not visible*) but until you people have learnt——

VEZABAR (*noisily again*): Yes—yes. Until we 'ave learnt—an' you an' odder gringos an' dam' silly bitches of island girls will teach us. Yes—yes. An' make plenty money out of Corabana—

FORTROSE (*coldly*): Corabana doesn't pay for itself.

VEZABAR (*triumphantly*): Corabana pay for itself when me an' my frien's run dis island. Yes—an' soon it pays for itself much better—when UNUTO 'as gone. (*He rises and grins.*)

FORTROSE (*rising*): You're giving yourself away badly now, Vezabar. Well, you had your chance—and wouldn't take it. You've been sent here to make mischief. Already several UNUTO clinics and schools have been destroyed, and if I can find proof that you incited the men up there to destroy our property, I shall have you arrested, tried, and, I trust, sent to prison.

VEZABAR: Big talk! I am very frightened. (*He guffaws heartily.*)

FORTROSE: But that's not all. Even if I can't find any proof—even if nothing more happens—I give you just two weeks in which to finish your business here, and after that I shall have you deported from this island. I have authority to do that.

VEZABAR *stares at him insolently for a moment.* FORTROSE, *as if interview were over, goes to telephone at his desk, sits down and takes up receiver.*

FORTROSE (*into telephone*): Put me through to Major Munro please. (*Looks across at VEZABAR, who has now strolled to door right, where he turns.*) Major Munro, by the way, is head of our Security unit.

VEZABAR (*at first loud and jeering but becoming quieter and more menacing during two speeches that follow*): Aut'ority! Aut'ority! Security! Security! Big talk! In two weeks you send me away from Corabana, where I belong an' you do not belong. Big talk! Sir Fortrose—you kid yourself. Why you think I come here to see you?

FORTROSE (*waiting at telephone*): I've been wondering. (*Into telephone.*) Yes, I'll hold on.

VEZABAR: I ask myself—is big man? Is strong man—tough guy—yes? No. (*He makes a rude derisive noise.*) Kind of man couldn't keep own wife out of odder men's blankets. How you t'ink you manage Vezabar, eh? Better go 'ome quick—play golf game—read books for women. Dangerous 'ere soon. Better go 'ome to nice tea party **where you belong.** Hasta la Vista!

He swaggers out right. FORTROSE, *who has been listening to him with great self-control, now attends to telephone.*

FORTROSE (*into telephone*): Oh—I'm sorry, Munro. Yes, this is Fortrose. There was somebody here, a gentlemen who was trying hard

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to make me lose my temper. . . . Never mind, tell you later. The point is, I must visit the North Section today, and I thought you'd better drive me up there. . . . Yes, I thought Santa Rosa first. . . . Yes, as soon as we can. Say, quarter to two here. By the way, it's not suddenly turned colder, has it? . . . I see. Probably a touch of something then. Look—I'll have to be back tonight—I'm expecting a call from Washington—so let's make it half-past one here, or earlier if you can. . . .

The curtain, which has been travelling slowly, is down.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SCENE I

Scene as before, a fortnight later. The time is late afternoon. It is sunset, and there is a warm but not too bright light flooding the stage and gilding the hills seen through opening at back. But this light begins to fade slowly almost from rise of curtain. This discovers RIBERAC and CHU sitting in silent intimacy. From distance at back can be heard the sound of a guitar played rather slowly and softly giving effect of pleasant melancholy. The whole scene strikes this note. It is some moments before anything is said. The guitar music, which is faded down or brought up very carefully, continues throughout the scene between RIBERAC and CHU.

RIBERAC (*quietly*): Where are your thoughts, my friend?

CHU (*smiling, softly*): Above our village, on the hillside, was a little old temple, where often we used to go. It was covered with wistaria, and in Spring the slopes above were bright with yellow and purple azaleas. The bells of this temple were very old too, and the sound they made was not very loud but very nice, very charming. When we were children we were very happy there—a long time ago.

RIBERAC: And now it is all gone.

CHU: No, I think it is still there. The village, the hillside, the little old temple—they have seen such change, much trouble. But in China we have a saying “The wind blows, the grass bends”.

RIBERAC (*still quietly but rather harshly*): But your family has vanished, you are far away, and your happiness has gone.

CHU: I had it here in my thoughts. But there was of course a sadness too. Like a poem. We have many such poems. They are very charming.

RIBERAC (*after a pause*): I had two friends I loved in the Resistance with me, two who were afterwards caught and killed. There was a time when we all three hid together in the Camargue, at the mouth of the Rhone. And on one of the first mornings there, among the salt marshes and the lagoons, when everything was clear and bright, as if it had just been made that morning, we saw the flamingos, a cloud of pink and scarlet wings, rise into the blue air. And we laughed aloud—for happiness. Afterwards my friends died. I think I died too. So did the world that made us laugh with happiness that morning.

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CHU: No, no—the sun still shines on this country you speak about, and the birds still stretch their charming wings. Somebody laughs with happiness, no doubt. Remember—the wind blows, the grass bends. Then, when the wind has gone, the grass is upright once more. In China we are like the grass.

RIBERAC: In Europe we can be broken.

CHU: You are still too young. Like children who see the rain falling and think they can never play in the sunshine again. (*A pause.*) Everything that is happening in the world now also happened in China long ago. We are new type of Civil Servant. In China, three thousand years ago, it was decided to have new type of Civil Servant.

RIBERAC: But no atom bombs.

CHU: Atom bombs can only destroy and kill. Destruction and death are not new. They were there also in China, three thousand years ago. But it is not the moment for such thoughts. Let us continue to think of more pleasing and poetical things.

They are silent for a few moments during which they sit brooding and the distant guitar is faintly heard.

Tonight there is a big festival—fiesta.

RIBERAC: Yes. I have arranged to celebrate it myself in a modest way. I am dining with some of the shipping people at Pierre's, and I shall drink a great deal of champagne from Chile, which they will pretend is French, and then some really excellent Courvoisier. In four hours time I hope to be quietly and decently drunk.

CHU (*politely*): That will be very nice.

RIBERAC: You can join me if you wish.

CHU: Thank you, but I think that will not be possible. I have promised to spend this evening with Dr. Melnik, who is very unhappy, I think. And he does not like Pierre's restaurant because it is a centre of reaction. It is possible, I think, to be too politically minded.

RIBERAC: There used to be a vaudeville trick called Sawing a Woman in Half. Now it is no longer a trick, an illusion. You can hear the saw scraping the ribs of the world.

CHU (*smiling, but with touch of seriousness*): That is defeatist talk from United Nations official. We are here to protect those ribs.

RIBERAC: I am off duty now. (*Carefully, behind cover of apparent lightness.*) And there is something else. There are times when we seem to have no more decision, no will to act according to our real desires, but play parts that have been mysteriously allotted to us, like so many pieces on a chess board. And this—I mean here and now—is such a time. Fortrose is late. Melnik has not arrived. We sit

waiting here. It is a moment of quiet, of emptiness, before the unknown chess player makes his next move.

CHU: In the East we are accustomed to such fatalism. But in a Western man it could mean something else, something quite different.

RIBERAC: What—for example?

CHU (*quietly, without accusing tone*): That perhaps you have done something of which you are ashamed, and so try to hide it from yourself.

RIBERAC (*softly, carefully*): And what is this—something?

CHU (*smiling*): No, no, please I am not accusing. I am giving what may be psychological explanation of fatalistic feelings. (*Looks around him. Light has faded considerably.*) It is nearly dark. Shall we turn on lights?

RIBERAC: No, it is better like this. Soon there will be too (*he lights a cigarette*) many lights and too much noise.

CHU: Lights and noise make nice simple people very gay, very happy.

RIBERAC (*slowly*): I am not a nice simple person. (*Pause.*) When you remember that already you are a skeleton, then it is time to drink, which is something no skeleton can do.

Enter MELNIK, carrying several small flat boxes. He is in an excited state. Almost immediately he switches on lights that illuminate the right half and centre of stage but still leave desk and left in shadow.

MELNIK: Let us have light! That is better. But let us not be clearly seen in light. These must be closed.

He goes to close doors/windows at back.

RIBERAC: Why should they be closed?

MELNIK (*closing them*): It is safer. Where is Sir Edward?

CHU: We have been waiting for him. For you too. But why do you speak of safety? Everything is quiet, very peaceful.

MELNIK (*coming down*): Too quiet—too peaceful.

CHU: It is the quiet hour before the fiesta begins.

MELNIK (*fiercely*): It is the quiet before the storm. Something stinking dam' bad will happen soon. Counter-revolutionary tactics. Militant reaction. Fascist outbreaks. That is why I bring these—(*shows them the small flat boxes.*) Emergency dressings, left by army. Lint—gauze—pads—morphia. One for you—(*gives one to CHU.*)

CHU (*accepting it*): Thank you—but I think such a thing will not be necessary.

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MELNIK (*giving one to RIBERAC*): And you—take it. I am not fooling.

RIBERAC (*taking it, with a shrug*): Many thanks. But I need a gin and Dubonnet—not a bandage.

MELNIK: You do not know what you need. I will tell you. But—one moment—I leave a box on the desk here for Sir Edward—(*goes across to desk with it.*)

RIBERAC: He will laugh at you.

MELNIK (*angrily*): Yes, yes—no doubt. He has already laughed too much. British humour—*Punch* paper. (*Imitating FORTROSE.*) *My dear chap!* But we are not in London—in nice Athenæum Club, where I once take tea—very bad.

CHU: But all island is quiet. No more attacks on UNUTO places. No more speeches by this Vezabar. Perhaps he has gone.

MELNIK: I tell you—all too quiet. If little things still happening, that is not bad. But when all is quiet, when nothing happens, that is the time to be careful. It means that plans have been made—for big outbreak. And when is best time?—oh, it is an old trick—I have seen it before—when guard is relaxed for holiday—for fiesta. I smell it—smell it in the air, my friends.

CHU: Louis feels something too. But perhaps not quite of this kind.

RIBERAC: I do not know of what kind. It is something different I feel—a playing of parts, a sleepwalking——

MELNIK: So—then wake up, wake up! On guard! Action—action! Militant preparations! And I will tell you. Vezabar has not gone. One of my nurses—*island girl*—saw him this morning. He is quiet. He is secret. He makes no more speeches. Why?

RIBERAC: Probably because he has been told to leave the island, and his time is up.

MELNIK: Yes, yes—his time is up, as you say—and tonight there is big fiesta——

RIBERAC: Munro knows all about him.

MELNIK (*triumphantly*): And where is Munro? Ah—now then we say something. I have been to his office. He is not there. He has not been seen since last night.

RIBERAC (*shrugging*): What is that? He is probably amusing himself somewhere with that little brown poule of his——

MELNIK: Indian girl? No—I see her there outside his office—weeping—because he is gone and she does not know where.

RIBERAC (*rising lazily*): He has probably found another. But I had better enquire about him.

He crosses to desk and switches on a light there and then quietly telephones. Meanwhile MELNIK goes closer to CHU.

MELNIK (*with conspiratorial air*): You spend this evening with me, eh?

CHU: Oh—yes. Louis invited me to dinner but I told him I would be with you and that you do not like to dine at Pierre's.

MELNIK (*with deeper whisper*): No, I do not trust those people. And there are others I do not trust.

CHU: Perhaps that is very wise.

MELNIK (*raising his voice now*): I can be wrong. It is partly instinct, I will admit, but then I have known these Fascist plots before, and they are all alike. But if I am wrong—what harm is done? (*Turning to RIBERAC, still at telephone.*) Well? What reply? You are ringing up Munro's office?

RIBERAC (*rather slowly*): Yes. There is no reply at all. Nobody there. But then—(*shrugging and coming away*) do not forget—the fiesta. This is Corabana—not Europe, my dear doctor.

MELNIK: It is the same world, the same epoch—with still the same treachery to the struggling masses—

RIBERAC (*sharply*): No political speech, if you please. And I have never seen the masses struggle yet, except to see who could throw the largest stone.

MELNIK (*angrily*): There are times when you talk like a reactionary—

RIBERAC (*sharply*): There are times when I feel like one.

MELNIK (*angrily*): Then why do you pretend to work here—with us?

RIBERAC (*with breath*): I could tell you, as I have said to others, that I work here simply for eight thousand five hundred dollars a year and allowances. But now I will add this. I work here too in the hope that we can help to produce a few more civilised persons out of your masses.

MELNIK (*also with breath now*): And I tell you—that I am suspicious of talk of civilised persons that keeps out the masses and regards them with scorn. That is not true civilisation, which is rooted in pity and hope for the masses. This earth is the home of Man, all men, and not hotel-de-luxe for a few special persons. (*Going closer and lowering his voice.*) And I tell you another thing—what I have already told Professor Chu—I do not trust you, Monsieur Ribérac—I do not trust you at all.

RIBERAC *looks at him steadily for a moment, then shrugs his shoulders and glances away.*

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RIBERAC (*lightly*): I have long since tired of arguing with fanatics.

Enter JILL right. She is already dressed for the evening and looks very beautiful and rather excited.

JILL: Oh—where's Edward? I suppose you're waiting for him.

RIBERAC: Yes. And we do not know where he is.

JILL: No, and you all look furious. (*Turning to CHU, smiling.*) No, not you—Professor Chu—you never look furious.

CHU (*smiling*): Seeing you look so beautiful and charming, Lady Fortrose, I am reminded that I need bath and change of clothes. Excuse me, please. (*To MELNIK.*) I see you soon.

He goes out right. JILL, still smiling, sits near centre with a deliberate ease and grace that has something almost insolent about it. This is done for the benefit of MELNIK, who is standing glowering at her. RIBERAC, who notices this and is amused, seats himself downstage left of them. MELNIK is standing right of JILL.

JILL (*with insolent sweetness*): I wish you wouldn't glower at me like that, Dr. Melnik. Is it really such a crime in your eyes for a woman to wear pretty clothes and try to look attractive?

MELNIK (*rather taken aback*): I was thinking of other things—more important.

JILL: I don't believe you were. But still—(*breaks off to look at him a moment, then, with cool decision.*) Dr. Melnik, it's possible that you and I may never meet again.

MELNIK (*impressed*): So!

JILL (*coolly*): Yes—so! Now when you first came here I did my best to be friendly, as I did with all members of my husband's staff. But from the first you showed that you disliked me. Clearly you hate the sight of me, don't you? Now would you mind telling me why?

MELNIK (*muttering*): It does not matter.

JILL: Probably not, but I'm curious. Do you really believe that all women should wear flat-heeled shoes, dresses like sacks, and have faces like old boots?

MELNIK (*more at ease now*): I think women—whatever their shoes or their faces—should play their part in our struggle in this life.

JILL: I would have thought most women—poor darlings—play more than their part. (*Mischievously.*) But not me—of course.

MELNIK: You amuse yourself all the time. No doubt you think that it's very nice for you.

JILL: But *you* don't, do you?

MELNIK: No.

JILL (*sweetly*): But then, I do. And after all it's my life I'm living.

MELNIK (*pointedly, impressively*): That is where you are wrong. I was wrong too. You do not think it is very nice for you. Are you a happy woman? No. Are you a satisfied woman? No. Any one of my nurses—yes, with ugly dresses and perhaps ugly faces—feels better than you do—not so restless—not so hungry in the heart. And this you know yourself——

JILL (*protesting, though hit*): I don't. I never heard such——

MELNIK (*cutting in, triumphantly pointing at her*): Yes, you do. It is written there. You run about, neglect your husband, make mischief, all because you are not happy, not satisfied with yourself. You make men fall in love. What for? You want them? No. Because you must convince yourself it is all right—you are wonderful creature—and all the time you know it is all wrong—not proper woman's life you are leading. Not proper life for anybody. All holiday without work. Life for a child not for woman of thirty-five——

JILL (*jumping up, furious*): And I suppose you think this house runs itself—with all its damned lunches and dinners and idiotic cocktail parties! I've even had to plan and run about for *you*—though thank God I won't have to do it any longer.

MELNIK (*ignoring this, sternly*): Women who think of nothing but looking pretty—nice clothes—all very gay, very sweet—should become actress—film star—to amuse thousands of workers in hours of recreation. If not, then become capitalist's plaything—perhaps that is what you plan—but do not expect to last very long. (*Delivers final judgment, impressively.*) Lady Fortrose, the world is now very poor. You are too expensive. We cannot afford you. Good night.

He stumps to door right.

JILL (*angrily*): Good-bye.

MELNIK (*turning at door, with a grin*): Much better. Good-bye.

He goes out.

JILL: And then they say women have the last word. What a type! Give me one of those horrible cigarettes of yours, please, Louis. (*He does, and lights it for her during following speeches, after which she smokes quickly and is restless.*) I didn't think he'd be able to make me lose my temper like that.

RIBERAC: He is good at it. He made me lose my temper too. (*Looking at her, softly.*) But what did you mean, my dear Jill, when you told him that you might not meet again?

JILL: I'm sorry, Louis, but—(*shrugs.*)

RIBERAC: It is no business of mine?

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JILL: Quite.

RIBERAC: Then it has nothing to do with UNUTO—eh?

JILL (*surprised*): Good Lord—no. What a question!

RIBERAC (*slowly*): I thought that, talking to some of your friends—Dayton, perhaps, you might have heard something.

JILL: What could I have heard?

RIBERAC: Melnik thinks we might have some real trouble—perhaps an organised outbreak—tonight. Because of the fiesta.

JILL: I'd forgotten about the fiesta.

RIBERAC: I thought you liked fiestas.

JILL: I do. I adore seeing people letting themselves go and not giving a damn. And I only hope that UNUTO is booted out of here before they've abolished all fiestas in favour of discussion groups and skows of those dreary little films about inoculating babies and canning pineapples. (*Stops, almost to recover breath, then looks at RIBERAC and grins at him.*) Well, Louis, I don't think you've ever liked me much—I don't believe you really like anybody—but at least I've never had to pretend to you.

RIBERAC: No.

JILL: Or you with me—um?

RIBERAC: Not much.

JILL (*cheerfully*): I've always suspected you're a bit of a crook. Are you?

RIBERAC: Well, I find it a responsibility to have Louis Riberac on my hands. He has some expensive tastes.

JILL: You need some of your bitter black coffee to make these cigarettes even tolerable.

RIBERAC (*rather dreamily*): Yes—and a tender sunlight—and plane trees—and a *fine*—France. . . .

JILL: Tell me something—honestly now——

RIBERAC: I am always honest with you.

JILL: What do you think of Edward—I mean, in relation to me?

RIBERAC: I think he is too good for you.

JILL: Don't be boring. You're talking like Ann Westfield now. I know I've behaved badly tarding around.

RIBERAC: He is too kind, too generous, too trusting, too sympathetic. He ought to lose his temper—and beat you. You would think that was wonderful.

JILL: No I shouldn't. And you're just being obvious and boring now, Louis. I really don't know why I'm talking to you like this.

RIBERAC: Since I retired from the sexual life everybody talks to me——

JILL: What I object to is being thought a shallow little creature, like some half-witted debutante. I have my own point of view, and it happens to be quite different from Melnik's—and, unfortunately, from Edward's. I don't think what either of them wants is any use to a woman like me. I'm always being told that if they lose, then there'll be another war that will leave the world in ruins. All right, I'll take the ruins. I feel I could live quite happily in them with the right kind of man.

RIBERAC: And I feel it is no longer any use talking. A moment has arrived that I have known before—in June Nineteen-Forty and several times afterwards. Though we may still talk and talk, we will now act according to the mysterious plan already laid down for us.

JILL (*who has been staring at him*): So that is what you feel?

RIBERAC (*looking curiously at her*): Yes. And I see that you feel it too.

JILL (*slowly, almost in a whisper*): Perhaps. Not quite like that, I think. But it's curious. I've been wondering why—I find it so difficult to make up my mind . . . as if I might as well let things slide because anyhow they'll go their own way. . . . (*Pulling herself up a little.*) Does it make you feel frightened?

RIBERAC: A little—yes. I need a few drinks. I ought to be having one now.

Enter FORTROSE right. He is quietly cheerful and brisk, in sharp contrast to the other two.

FORTROSE (*moving towards desk*): Oh Jill—Dayton's out there on the veranda. I couldn't talk to him because Melnik's been hammering at me, as if I were a Party meeting.

JILL (*going up*): Nils Dayton wants to talk to you, Edward.

FORTROSE (*cheerfully*): But I'm not sure I want to talk to him. I've a lot of work to do, my love. Better take him away and let him sample the fiesta.

JILL (*gravely*): It's very important. He must see you.

FORTROSE (*looking hard at her*): You say that?

JILL: Yes, I say it.

FORTROSE (*quietly*): All right, Jill. Please send him along in about five minutes. Enough for you, Louis?

RIBERAC: Yes.

JILL (*going right*): All right.

She goes out right. RIBERAC moves up towards desk.

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FORTROSE (*briskly*): Sorry I'm so late, Louis. (*He can be seen glancing at messages on desk, but not sitting.*) Schwaber kept me too long, and then Melnik held me up out there. By the way, he seems to think you're probably quietly selling us out—capitalist pirates' fifth column—you're not, are you?

RIBERAC: No.

FORTROSE: I told him you weren't. I gather you know what Melnik thinks. Quiet before the storm—the *putsch* under cover of the fiesta—Vezabar here—Munro gone. Eh?

RIBERAC: Yes. I think it is mostly exaggeration. The extreme Left, being constant plotters themselves, always see plots everywhere. And that is Melnik.

FORTROSE: And I gather he's left some emergency dressings on this deck. (*He sees the box.*) Here they are, I suppose. Oh—well, we live in two different worlds, Melnik and I.

RIBERAC: Yes. But I have been in his world too. It really exists, you know.

FORTROSE: Yes, and it will continue as long as men continue to think in terms of power politics. But I can't do this job properly unless I feel that another, saner world is taking the place of his world. Fear and violence can only breed more fear and violence. That doesn't mean, however, as Melnik seems to imagine, that I am really asleep in the smoke-room of the Reform Club. What about Munro?

RIBERAC: No reply from his office, but he's probably started his fiesta early and told the staff they could go. I know one or two quiet little haunts of his, and I may just have time before dinner to see if he is there.

FORTROSE: All right. I shall be here if there is any news. By the way, you never told me that that stuff up in the North Hills was beryl. (*Looks at him sharply.*)

RIBERAC (*rather confused*): Well—I was not quite sure—and——

FORTROSE (*cutting in*): Also, by the way, your friend Mr. Lerma has just arrived again.

RIBERAC (*taken aback*): Has he? I did not know——

FORTROSE (*cutting in*): Yes, the yacht's out there, complete with Mr. Lerma and an appreciation of the finer things of life—and no doubt Matisse and the earlier Picasso in the dining saloon. It was Schwaber who told me you'd been asking him about beryllium, and that's how I guessed. But a friend of mine at Cambridge also suggested that the stuff might be beryl.

RIBERAC (*at ease now*): I do not think it is very important. To

extract beryllium from beryl is difficult and expensive, for the yield is very small—only four or five per cent, I am told.

FORTROSE (*dryly*): You were told it by the same article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* that I read. But Mr. Lerma and his colleagues in Pan-American Alloys are probably well ahead of that edition of the *Encyclopædia*, which is comfortably out of date. And then again, Louis, what may have been found up there may be actual deposits of beryllium minerals. And my Cambridge friend, who's also well ahead of our *Encyclopædia*, has told me one or two interesting facts about beryllium. (*There is a knock at door right. FORTROSE calls.*) Come in.

DAYTON *enters, remaining near door. He is very carefully dressed.*

DAYTON: Say—I'm sorry.

FORTROSE (*cheerfully*): No, no, come in. We've finished. Just chatting about beryllium.

DAYTON (*carefully*): Is that so? Good evening, Mr. Riberac.

RIBERAC: Hello—and good-bye. I am just going.

DAYTON (*heartily*): Well, beryllium certainly is wonderful stuff. As we say—out of this world. And try and find it—and then you're dead sure it's out of this world. (*Laughs and comes further in.*)

RIBERAC (*to FORTROSE*): I will look in then later tonight—perhaps quite late.

FORTROSE: Thank you, Louis. Where are you dining?

RIBERAC (*as he goes right*): Pierre's.

FORTROSE (*calling, jovially*): Lucky man. Tell them to save something for Jill and me—we shall be dining there tomorrow night—probably a farewell feast before we fly home on leave——

RIBERAC *has turned at the door, staring with concern at FORTROSE and looking as if about to say something urgent. FORTROSE is surprised, then asks quietly.*

Anything wrong, Louis?

RIBERAC (*confused*): No—no. I thought—I had forgotten something. Just stupid. I am sorry.

He goes out right. FORTROSE, puzzled, looks after him a moment, then turns to DAYTON.

FORTROSE: Poor Louis seemed rather embarrassed about something. (*Looks again at DAYTON, who is none too happy.*) Incidentally, so do you.

DAYTON: Well—I guess I am.

FORTROSE: Sit down—and then it may all seem less difficult. Leaning back and then stretching out the legs often helps. (DAYTON

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sits but does not relax. After waiting a moment, FORTROSE sits too and looks at him enquiringly.) Yes?

DAYTON: It's about Jill. (FORTROSE *makes no reply, so* DAYTON *has to continue.*) We've been going places—having fun——

FORTROSE: I know you have. It's been very nice for Jill, particularly as I've been so busy.

DAYTON (*staring, suddenly aggressive*): Look—are you kidding? If so—well, I can do it the hard way. Suits me.

FORTROSE: I'm not kidding. And whatever you're going to do, please don't do it the hard way. (*As* DAYTON *hesitates, adds impatiently.*) Go on, Dayton.

DAYTON: I'm crazy about her. I wouldn't say she's quite the same, but I guess she likes me quite a lot.

FORTROSE (*politely*): I gather she does. So?

DAYTON: I'm leaving soon and I want to take her back to California with me. I've asked her to marry me as soon as she can get free. She hasn't said Yes but she hasn't said No. I'll persuade her all right. I tell you, I'm crazy about her. Never wanted a woman so much. And I can give her a swell time, and that's what she wants—what she needs. You know she doesn't like it here.

FORTROSE: I like it even less—but then we didn't come here for a holiday—and a swell time.

DAYTON (*grimly*): Okay—I'll lay it straight on the line.

FORTROSE: Do.

DAYTON: You're never going to hold her—and if it isn't me, then it'll be some other guy, who may not be able to give her all she wants. Even if you went straight back to England, took some other job and made some real money, I doubt if you could hold her now. Sorry to talk this way——

FORTROSE (*cutting in, smoothly*): No, that's all right, Dayton. (*He pauses.*)

DAYTON: Comes as a nasty jolt, I know. Had to face it myself once.

FORTROSE (*slowly*): No, that's not the trouble—though the jolt is there, of course. My difficulty is—we don't seem to be talking the same language. Our words sound alike but they have different meanings. Marriage, for instance. You *have* been married before, haven't you?

DAYTON: Twice. First one divorced me. I divorced the second. Just didn't work out either time.

FORTROSE: And why should it work out this time?

DAYTON: Because I'm crazy about her. I told you. Never wanted a woman so much. She's got me——

FORTROSE (*rather sharply*): Yes, we'll take that for granted. But—if you'll allow me to say so, Dayton—you sound more like a child demanding a bar of chocolate than a mature man contemplating marriage. And this talk of marriage not working out, as if it were a mechanical process, makes me wonder if you have the least notion what marriage really is or even what any intimate personal relationship really is. Why—you talk about going off and having a swell time as if you were an adolescent invited to a dance.

DAYTON (*getting up, annoyed*): Oh—don't be such a stuffed-shirt. I didn't come here for a lecture.

FORTROSE (*not rising*): You came here to tell me you propose to take my wife away from me, and I think the least you can do is to listen patiently to a lecture if I should choose to give you one. But I don't. I merely want to tell you that I don't believe you know what a real relationship to a woman is, what love is, what marriage means—

DAYTON (*as he sits, cutting in*): Wait a minute—before you begin to put me wise to it all. You haven't made such a hell of a success of *your* marriage, have you—or else I wouldn't be here.

FORTROSE: No, I haven't—even though I rejected your farmyard-and-swell-time ideas of sex a long time ago—

DAYTON (*impatiently*): Oh—skip it!

FORTROSE (*trying to be patient*): It's been mostly my fault. I realise that. But there are special circumstances in our case—

DAYTON (*cutting in, with a grin*): You bet! There always are.

FORTROSE (*jumping up, in sudden fury*): Oh—don't be such a bloody lout! (*He moves away, trying to control his temper. DAYTON gets up slowly, watching him, rather pleased that he is now the cooler of the two. After pacing a little, FORTROSE turns up near desk and looks at DAYTON. He is now in control of himself, and his tone is icy.*) If my wife decides to go to California or anywhere else with you, clearly I can't stop her—and I wouldn't dream of trying to. But I shan't divorce her so that she can marry you, nor, if it lies within my power, will I allow her to divorce me. And I may add, to show that more than jealousy is involved in this, that if you told me you were trying to marry one of the typists here, I should do all I could to prevent this marriage.

DAYTON (*ironically*): Thanks a lot. Glad to know that you think you own everybody round here.

FORTROSE: I wasn't suggesting such a thing.

DAYTON: No—but it was just one of those little slips that give a man away. The United Nations Big Shot on Corabana. Don't make me laugh. Well, I'm not asking any favours. Don't need to. I came

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here to talk things over in a friendly style. I thought by the way you've let Jill play around——

FORTROSE (*contemptuously, cutting in*): *Let Jill play around!* You talk as if she were a performing poodle instead of a sensitive, complicated, mysterious human being with whom you propose to enter into a most delicate and difficult relationship——

DAYTON (*more wondering than sneering*): God!—no wonder she says she's bored——

FORTROSE (*furious*): You——

But he checks himself because the door right has been flung wide open and JILL is standing there. She looks at the two men and takes in the situation.

JILL (*coming in a little*): I'm sorry but I just couldn't wait out there any longer. I shouldn't have agreed to this. I knew it wasn't the right way to go about it. Idiotic of me. (*She looks from one to the other, trying to keep the situation light.*) Sorry, chaps. You're both furious, aren't you?

She looks at FORTROSE, who does not reply but gives her a long, level look. She then looks at DAYTON, who gives a slight shrug and a nod towards FORTROSE, as if to suggest the fault is FORTROSE'S. She takes this in.

All right, Nils. My turn now.

DAYTON (*protesting*): Listen, sweet, remember what you promised——

JILL: Yes, and I shan't be long, but we can't leave it like this. Go and get yourself a drink—and wait for me on the veranda.

DAYTON: You're the boss.

He goes out right. They wait until a moment or so after he has closed the door behind him.

JILL (*abandoning the light touch*): Well, Edward?

FORTROSE (*carefully*): After listening to a lot of childish rubbish about giving you what you want and swell times, I told him that so far as I was concerned divorce was out of the question.

JILL: I thought you would. Why?

FORTROSE: Because I've no intention of helping you to tie yourself to a greedy, possibly cruel, adolescent.

JILL: I don't see him like that. Young for his age—unformed perhaps——

FORTROSE: Well I do. An adolescent who expects his marriages to work themselves out for him.

JILL: He may think like that. I don't. No woman does.

FORTROSE: I know very well you wouldn't have considered him seriously for a moment if it hadn't been for one thing.

JILL: What's that? Money? Thick steaks and thin stockings? Swell times in Pasadena?

FORTROSE: No. I know you better than that. It's because you see him as the opposite of what you've come to dislike in me, of the work we're trying to do here, of a certain way of thinking, feeling, living. He's the enemy. So you've gone over to him.

JILL: There's a room I can't live in any longer, and he's a door out.

FORTROSE: That's not very flattering to him.

JILL: It's probably how most women think of men. And anyhow I don't flatter Nils. Though he's a fine animal.

FORTROSE: But—from what he said—I gather you've not allowed him yet to make love to you.

JILL: No, of course not.

FORTROSE (*gently*): It isn't *of course not*—Jill.

JILL: Oh—why isn't it?

FORTROSE (*slowly*): This dangerous situation wouldn't have arisen if you hadn't kept him at arm's length. It would have been much better, Jill, if you had treated him as generously as you did young Napier, and van Loren.

JILL (*gasping with surprise*): Edward!

FORTROSE: Yes, Jill?

JILL (*staring at him*): Do you mean to say—you knew all the time about Bill Napier and van Loren?

FORTROSE (*gently*): My dear, by this time I may be a dim grey official, a boring prig, a stuffed-shirt, as Dayton says, but I'm not altogether a fool, you know. It's been my business to know what was happening on this island. As a matter of fact it was I who had Napier transferred and van Loren moved on to another job, before the situation each time became too embarrassing for us all.

JILL (*staring at him, fascinated*): And I thought I knew all about you, Edward. I—I despised you for being so blind and *trusting*.

FORTROSE (*gently*): I think you probably despised yourself and then passed it on to me.

JILL (*more urgently now*): But—didn't you care?

FORTROSE (*suddenly revealing himself*): CARE? Good God! I've sat here—late at night—(*but he breaks off. Then he adds quietly.*) But we're not discussing that.

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JILL (*impatiently*): Oh—don't talk as if I were on an agenda! Why—why—the very first time you found out—didn't you tell me straight you knew what I was up to? Why didn't you tell me to behave myself or you'd boot me out of the place?

FORTROSE: You'd have hated it. .

JILL: I'd have adored it. You too probably. Don't you see that what I couldn't bear was sitting around on the edge of this great dreary UNUTO nonsense, just waiting to be noticed now and again—that I had to be bang in the centre for somebody, to create some excitement somewhere, even if it meant cheapening myself? Specially on this damned treacherous island, where everything's battering at your senses.

FORTROSE (*with increasing note of apology*): I understand about the island. I'd brought you here. I had a difficult and responsible job, which you didn't even appreciate. I was——

JILL (*cutting in, patiently*): Oh—don't be so apologetic. I can't stand it. That's one of the things that's been so boring. And it's one of the reasons why brutes and cads are often so refreshing. They don't bother about being apologetic, but sail right in.

FORTROSE (*coolly now*): Let's talk about Dayton—and not brutes and cads in general. You're not in love with him——

JILL: Not yet. But I might be—if——

FORTROSE (*cutting in*): If he proved himself as good a lover as he is an enemy of everything I stand for. Well, I warn you now, Jill, that he won't be. He's all wrong. At the best he'll be an insensitive greedy snatcher, and he might easily be something worse. It's *like* offering a violin to an ape. I may have made mistakes but in some ways I understand you better than you do yourself. So I'm warning you——

JILL (*stormily*): I don't take warnings—just be human—and not so damned high-and-mighty——

FORTROSE: I'm trying to be fair. I could easily make an emotional appeal——

JILL (*angrily, in despair*): No, you couldn't. You've forgotten how to. Not on the agenda——

At this moment ANN enters briskly from left. She is dressed for the evening, in a modest but attractive fashion. She is in before she realises she has interrupted an intimate scene.

ANN (*taking it in*): Oh—sorry!

JILL (*furiously*): Sorry! Sorry! Oh—for God's sake stop being sorry. Stay here and hold his hand—or take him out and get him

screaming drunk—I don't care. Have a good time. I'm going to enjoy my fiesta.

She hurries, half-sobbing as she goes, out right and bangs the door behind her. There is a moment's silence, during which ANN, after an enquiring look at FORTROSE, who does not return it, quietly closes door left and then comes in.

ANN (*quietly*): Well—that's it, I guess. (*After FORTROSE makes no reply.*) I was on my way out to the Barlings' but I thought I'd look in first to ask if you had any news.

FORTROSE (*shaken, but trying to be steady*): No. Munro can't be found, but that's probably nothing. Louis is looking for him. Vezabar's been seen. Lerma's back and Dayton's preparing to leave. May all add up to something. But no real news. Just rumours. Probably nothing but the fiesta atmosphere.

ANN: Island nerves, I guess. I feel it too. •

FORTROSE (*suddenly smiling at her*): My dear Ann, you're our rock and shining tower. Thank God you didn't leave me, as you threatened to.

ANN (*trying to smile and keep it light*): Well—we've been told what to do, haven't we? The Barlings don't need me. So—shall I stay and hold your hand—or do we go out?

FORTROSE (*with same attempt at lightness*): I can't go out tonight, my dear Ann. A lot of odds and ends have piled up here that I must get rid of. And if by any chance there should be any trouble—well, then I'm here where I can be found.

ANN: I'll stay then.

FORTROSE: No—no—why should you?

ANN (*with an effort to be steady*): Because you're alone—and I love you.

He goes closer to her, looking bewildered and concerned. She shrinks a little, then as he puts out a hand tentatively, she suddenly goes forward and leans against him so that he has to put an arm round her. She bursts into tears against his shoulder.

Hold me a minute. Don't say anything. Just hold me.

He holds her and broods over her a moment or two, not like a lover but rather paternally. Then she breaks away, and speaks in a muffled voice.

Lend me a handkerchief. (*As he does*) I suppose it's humiliating and I'm making a fool of myself—but I don't care. It had to come out. (*Dabs herself.*)

FORTROSE: You and I, Ann, we're the same sort of people—

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ANN (*urgently*): Of course we are. I knew that from the first. And she isn't. She's all wrong, and you know it. And I've had to watch her cheating on you——

FORTROSE (*rather wearily*): No, I knew. Nobody seems to think I've got eyes and ears—and some imagination—not even you, Ann. Sit down a minute, and let me explain something. Then you must go off to the Barlings.

ANN (*impatiently*): Oh, never mind about them! (*She sits down.*)

FORTROSE (*lightly*): I don't—much. But I'd like you to have a good evening out, my dear. You deserve one. (*A pause. He looks steadily at her. Change of tone.*) Ann, you're the best human being I've met on this job. I'm devoted to you. You're my kind of person.

ANN (*rather bitterly*): But that doesn't seem to be enough. Oh—I don't pretend to be glamorous——

FORTROSE (*cutting in, smoothly*): I wouldn't know. I don't think I'm glamour-minded. But I *do* know that sometimes you look beautiful. However, that's nothing to do with it.

ANN: Of course it has. Why didn't you tell me—if only just once—that I looked beautiful?

FORTROSE (*wryly*): Jill would say that it wasn't on the agenda. And it wasn't. When it flashed across my mind that you looked quite beautiful, we were usually working hard. (*Breaks off, then, gravely*) Ann, I must explain to you about Jill. I know you don't like her——

ANN (*impatiently*): I hate her—just as she hates me.

FORTROSE (*weightily*): And I love her. I fell in love with her twelve years ago, and I'm still in love with her. And that's as it should be. I must make you understand that.

ANN: Well, you won't. She's so completely and horribly wrong for you—not your kind of person—just the very opposite——

FORTROSE (*slowly*): That's why it's right. She seems to me the best of the other half of everything. She completes life and makes it whole. With her I'm not loving an extension or reflexion of myself, but somebody strange—from the mysterious other side—challenging . . .

ANN (*protesting*): No, Edward. This isn't about real people trying to live their lives together. It's just romantic theorising.

FORTROSE: But perhaps that's the way to live, otherwise you're just desperately improvising a charade. And anyhow I'm trying to tell you—as honestly as I can—what I feel. It seems to me this kind of life is right just because it completes things instead of separating them. Perhaps we're all too busy now loving our reflections and hating all that is strange and outside ourselves, waiting to complete us.

ANN: I've heard you say that before. It may be true. But we're talking now about something personal, intimate—about a woman. Oh yes—a beautiful woman too, no doubt——

FORTROSE (*checking her*): Yes, a woman—and to me a beautiful woman. But I've never even seen her beauty as something to be possessed—that's the mistake of men like Dayton, for it can't be possessed—but I've always seen it—— (*he hesitates, finding an image, and now to end of speech he is always hesitating a little, searching for the right phrase, speaking with great sincerity, and some shyness, while ANN, as he proceeds, begins crying very, very quietly*) as a sort of strange door . . . leading to the other side of things, the enchanted place. . . . You see it sometimes in the corner of a picture . . . in a line of verse . . . hear it for a moment perhaps in a string quartet . . . the enchanted place on the other side. . . . And there never has been enough time to go through that door and wonder and admire. But I felt it wouldn't matter even if we had to wait until we were old . . . because her beauty would remain for me when other men could no longer see it . . . and that strange door would be there, the enchanted country on the other side would still be there. . . . So it didn't matter too much—though it might hurt—what happened here between us, so long as at last we could go home together . . . go home. . . . There's no home for us now, perhaps not for anybody. Home is tomorrow. But we're beginning to build it today.

ANN (*in sudden despair*): Are we? I've always believed that and worked for it. But now I wonder. We may be deceiving ourselves, and home may be as far away tomorrow as it is today. Because time will take hold of tomorrow, to corrupt and destroy it, just as it has changed and ruined today.

FORTROSE (*very sincerely but with lighter tone*): But that's why it may be better to be a romantic theorist, my dear Ann. The pattern and the plan on which we build—like all that we really and most deeply desire, if we are wise—must not exist in time but in eternity.

A pause. She rises slowly and looks at him, pulling herself out of her crying.

ANN (*with attempt at lightness*): I guess I'd better go to the Barlings after all.

FORTROSE (*standing, smiling at her*): They'll be disappointed if you don't, especially old Barling—I've seen him looking at you. Have a good night out.

ANN (*about to go, she looks at him steadily and speaks very quietly*): I shall love you as long as I live—my darling. But I shall never mention it again—never call you my darling again—never again. . . .

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She goes out left rather blindly. He moves slowly and thoughtfully to open door/window at back. It is now quite dark out there, with perhaps a glitter or two of light, and we hear distantly the sound of gay-melancholy Central American dance music. After listening for a moment he goes and sits down at his desk, preparing to begin his night's work. Slow curtain with some music continuing, as he sits.

END OF SCENE ONE

ACT II

SCENE II

Scene as before, several hours later: it looks exactly as it was at end of last scene, with door/windows open at back. There is dance music coming through, but now it is heavier but less clearly heard.

ROSA is discovered on stage, sitting below desk, obviously left on duty as she was at end of Scene I, Act I. At back, just visible, is FELIPE. He is calling to ROSA, who is clearly nervous and apprehensive, occasionally shakes her head, but mainly tries to ignore him. She can be doing some small job, such as entering up cable book—as before.

FELIPE (*calling*): Rosa! Rosa! (*Angrily.*) Rosa! Bistamma dubla—inish gratta snarla!

He comes forward a little—a Spanish-Indian youth, graceful, picturesque, but rather sinister—and laughs angrily. ROSA jumps up indignantly—obviously to tell him to go away.

At this moment RIBERAC enters right. He has the extremely careful movements and speech of a man who has had a great deal to drink but prides himself on being able to hold it. He is in fact quietly drunk. He takes in the situation at once.

RIBERAC (*sharply*): No-no-no! Allez vous en! Vamoos! Push off!

He moves to opening at back. FELIPE gives last angry laugh as he scuttles away. RIBERAC goes to opening and then just outside. There is a sound of glass breaking and a clatter of stone on wood. ROSA gives an exclamation of alarm and goes up nearer. RIBERAC now turns and comes in.

They are throwing stones now.

ROSA (*anxiously*): They did not hit you?

RIBERAC: No. It is not the night for me to be hit with stones. But it is a night when stones will be thrown. The throwers of stones must play their parts. I said so when the sun was setting, hours ago. I say it again now.

ROSA (*simply*): Are you a little drunk, Mr. Riberaç?

RIBERAC: Yes—a little—a little, my dear Rosa. Where is Sir Edward?

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ROSA: He has gone to the hospital to see Major Munro.

RIBERAC: Munro? What happened?

ROSA: He had an accident with his car. He is injured.

RIBERAC (*very quietly*): Was it a real accident?

ROSA: Nobody knows yet. Sir Edward thinks it was just an accident—bad luck——(*she hesitates*).

RIBERAC (*softly*): And you do not think so?

ROSA: No. But I know nothing about it. Just a feeling I have, Mr. Riberac.

RIBERAC: Why are you working so late tonight?

ROSA: I preferred to stay here.

RIBERAC: The young man who was here just now, is he in love with you?

ROSA (*simply*): He wants me.

RIBERAC: But you don't want him.

ROSA: No.

RIBERAC: Not even—sometimes?

ROSA: Yes—perhaps sometimes. But I know it would be bad if I went with him. I would lose—all this. I would be just an island girl again. Besides—(*she hesitates, then points shyly but proudly to the brooch she is wearing, the one he gave her*)—look——

RIBERAC: The brooch! How charming it looks!

ROSA (*warmly*): It is beautiful. (*She looks at him invitingly.*)

RIBERAC: But it was a good-bye present, you remember.

ROSA: But all that you said to me then is not true. You are not old. You are not a ghost. You are a young man. You can go out and drink, like young men do. If at first you could not love me very much, I would not mind, because I think that afterwards—it would be better.

RIBERAC: "Afterwards it would be better". It is there—and only there—that the realism of women breaks down. And you are wrong, my dear Rosa. This affair would begin badly and end worse. (*As she shows signs of distress he continues hastily.*) I will tell you a secret. In the tropics I do not want to make love. In Paris probably—or even in Birmingham among those beautiful trams—the prospect of making love to you would be delicious. But here I retreat from the sexual life. The whole earth and sea and sky are busy making love—it is too much. Here we must place culture above nature. Are you still reading the poet Shelley?

ROSA: Yes. I like him very much. Don't you?

RIBERAC: No. I think he is too vague, mad and Anglo-Saxon for me. But repeat some of his verse—if you can——

She is not sitting, as she was originally, and she looks hard at him for a moment, as if to discover if he is merely making fun of her. Then, as he gravely returns her look, very slowly and shyly, rather like a schoolgirl, she recites.

ROSA: “When the lamp is shatter’d,
The light in the dust lies dead;
When the cloud is scatter’d,
The rainbow’s glory is shed;
When the lute is broken——”

She hesitates, then repeats the last line, as if it will help her to remember the next line.

“When the lute is broken”— —

Something about “sweet tones” comes next, but I’m afraid I’ve forgotten—I’m sorry.

RIBERAC: That is quite all right. It was very charming. But do you know what a lute is, Rosa? (*She shakes her head rather mournfully.*) Well, it doesn’t matter. You need not be so sad about it.

ROSA (*mournfully*): I know I am still only an ignorant girl, Mr. Ribera. But I am trying hard to learn and to improve myself. You have been a great help to me.

RIBERAC (*rather bitterly*): So—I have been a great help to you—when you try hard to learn and to improve yourself?

ROSA (*steadily*): You—and UNUTO. You do not know what it means to an island girl like me. It is a new life—opening out like a flower——

RIBERAC (*with sudden harshness*): No it is not. It can’t be. Why do you talk this nonsense to me?

ROSA (*looking at him, stricken, humbly*): I don’t understand. Please—why are you suddenly angry with me?

RIBERAC (*after a tiny pause*): I am angry with you so that I shall not be angry with myself. It is a common trick, and you have only to give it a little time and it can destroy whole civilisations.

ROSA (*sadly*): You are too clever for me.

RIBERAC (*with a kind of bitter whisper*): I will tell you something much worse than that. I am also too clever for myself.

ROSA (*taking him in, calmly*): You are not a good man, like Sir Edward. But I could make you into a good man.

RIBERAC (*politely but impersonally*): Now that I am waiting here, you need not stay, Rosa.

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She rises quietly and moves to left. But just before door she turns and looks at him calmly if coldly.

ROSALIA (with sad dignity): My mother and my grandmother can sometimes see things before they happen. Perhaps I can too. Tomorrow you will be sorry you spoke to me like that. It will hurt you worse than it is hurting me now.

She goes out. He feels restless, uncomfortable. Music is heard again from back. He goes up and is just closing door/windows, shutting out sound of music, when FORTROSE enters right. His make-up should be paler than it was before. But he is mopping his face, and during opening speech he takes off his coat and puts it over back of convenient chair.

FORTROSE: Hello, Louis. It's sticky out tonight. I'm not really hot, yet I feel sweaty. Damned unpleasant!

RIBERAC: Rosa told me Munro is in hospital. I came to tell you I could not find him.

FORTROSE: I've just seen him. Arm broken—head badly cut and bruised—and probably nasty concussion. They wouldn't let him talk. Car went right over.

RIBERAC: An accident?

FORTROSE: Melnik says not, of course, and one of the sergeants supports him. But there was nobody with Munro when it happened, and he was out on the West Road. They're trying to round up some witnesses now.

RIBERAC (quietly): Rosa believes it was not a pure accident.

FORTROSE: That child's all nerves tonight. Doesn't even want to go home. Ann hasn't looked in, has she?

RIBERAC: I think not.

FORTROSE: I'll ask Ann to talk to Rosa, if she does look in. Have a good dinner, Louis?

RIBERAC: Yes, but the champagne was terrible. And even so, I drank far too much.

FORTROSE: Any particular reason?

RIBERAC: I think I am like poor little Rosa—all nerves tonight. I find now I hate these fiestas. Too much drumming and strumming and clapping and singing and sweating and clutching. I do not like being reminded that we are all still in a monkey-house.

FORTROSE (relaxing): You need some leave, Louis. So do I. Yet, I must say, coming back from the hospital just now I felt that if I'd had an evening out, and Jill with me, I could have enjoyed it. I suddenly felt a great affection for these people, Louis. They deserve all we can

do for them—and a lot more. And it doesn't follow, you know—as Jill seems to think, you too sometimes—that just because people are cleaner and healthier and can read and write, that all the colour and fun go. Gold help me!—for I suppose I often sound a dreary prig—but I like colour and fun too. What's the matter, Louis?

RIBERAC (*shrugging, ready to go now*): Too much food, too many drinks. A little sick perhaps.

KARAM *now appears at door right.*

KARAM: Sir——

FORTROSE (*rather surprised*): What is it, Karam?

KARAM: Senor Lerma here.

FORTROSE: A late caller. All right—show him in. (*As KARAM goes, he turns to RIBERAC.*) Like to clear out before he arrives, Louis?

RIBERAC (*with an effort*): If you please—no. I should like to see him for one minute. If you don't mind.

FORTROSE (*with a curious glance*): No, of course not. More your chum than mine.

RIBERAC (*who is tense, waiting*): No.

FORTROSE: You don't like him?

RIBERAC (*as before*): No.

FORTROSE: Well, don't upset him too much.

RIBERAC: He is not a man easily disturbed. But why not?

FORTROSE (*very quietly*): I am anxious to know the real reason he wants to see me as late as this. He may be the key figure.

RIBERAC: I think he is.

FORTROSE: On the other hand, I don't much believe in deliberate conspiracies. I wish I did, because they would make life much simpler. But we don't live in a world of neat plots, but in a foggy atmosphere of prejudices and cross-purposes, silly rumours, tragic blunders.

A moment's pause, then KARAM, holding open door right, admits LERMA, who is dressed as before.

LERMA (*smoothly*): Sir Edward, you must forgive me for calling on you at this time of night.

FORTROSE: Please don't apologise——

LERMA (*noticing RIBERAC*): Ah—Monsieur Riberac—we meet again——

RIBERAC (*tensely*): Yes, Mr. Lerma, we meet again. (*To FORTROSE.*) May I speak for one moment so that then I can leave you?

FORTROSE: Of course, Louis.

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RIBERAC (*taking thick envelope from his pocket*): Mr. Lerma, here are the two thousand five hundred dollars you gave me.

He holds out the envelope, and LERMA takes it, without looking at it.

LERMA (*calmly*): You are a very foolish young man, Monsieur Ribera. Now you have offended Sir Edward, you have displeased me, and you have robbed yourself of two thousand five hundred dollars.

FORTROSE: No, I'm not offended. I guessed something like this had happened. I feel better now. But perhaps you can explain yourself, Louis.

RIBERAC: I did not give him back his bribe——

LERMA (*cutting in, smoothly*): No, no——please, not a bribe, a genuine price. I would never think of buying an intelligent man for such a paltry sum. Let us call it——shall we say——*un pourboire*——

RIBERAC (*with furious anger*): If you were a younger man I would spit in your face for that.

FORTROSE (*hastily, as LERMA steps back*): No, Louis—you're talking to me now. Go on.

RIBERAC (*slowly, curiously cold now*): I did not return to him his *pourboire* because of UNUTO. But partly perhaps because of you, Edward. I have an affection for you and I will admit that when I feel good myself, then I like you all the better.

FORTROSE (*sincerely*): Thank you, Louis.

RIBERAC (*as before*): But it was chiefly this. I am now a lonely man. But there is somebody I have to live with——Louis Ribera. And for the last two weeks, though we have done no harm to you, we have not been comfortable together. I call him a fool. He calls me a rat. And somewhere, in the darkness at the back of my mind, there is a little radio . . . with Goebbels still talking. . . . That is something you do not understand. (*Formally.*) Sir Edward, you will of course please accept my resignation from your staff.

FORTROSE: Not until we have talked it over, Louis. Come and see me in the morning.

RIBERAC (*looking hard at him*): All right. Although it is only late at night I begin to tell the truth to you. But please promise me this—that when you have sent this man away—very soon, I hope—you will not stay here, waiting to see what other piece of your world here is rotten with corruption, but will go to your bedroom, lock the door and dream of your green English fields. (*He turns, stares at LERMA.*) For your sake I wish I still believed in Hell.

He goes out right. There is a moment's silence. Then LERMA, quite unshaken, sits down comfortably and looks smilingly at FORTROSE, who, not sitting yet and trying to recover himself, can now light a pipe or cigarette.

LERMA: One of our minor illusions, Sir Edward, is that the French are a sober people. Actually the figures for the consumption of alcohol in France clearly disprove this. And I think that young man——

FORTROSE (*cutting in, massively*): Mr. Lerma, Louis is a friend of mine. We won't discuss him. Moreover, it's late—I've still some work to do—and I don't like you. So please come to the point.

LERMA (*unruffled*): Certainly. But you will make it easier for me if you sit down. (FORTROSE *sits, not behind desk, but further down, not too far from LERMA.*) First, the offer I made you when we last met is still open. (*As FORTROSE makes a contemptuous gesture of dismissal*) Very well, you reject it. Next, I sail tomorrow morning. And I offer you an extremely comfortable passage as my guest.

FORTROSE (*surprised but not showing it too much*): But why should I want a passage on your yacht?

LERMA (*smiling*): Sir Edward, you force me to speak plainly.

FORTROSE: Make it as plain as you can.

LERMA (*carefully*): Dayton is an expert mineralogist on our staff. He has asked me for a stateroom on my yacht not only for himself but also for Lady Fortrose. It would be better, in my opinion, if you came with us as a third guest. (*As FORTROSE makes an impatient gesture and noise, as if about to break in, LERMA hastily stops him.*) And if I take you away from here early tomorrow morning, you will soon realise that I have done you a considerable service, and then your gratitude would be useful to me.

FORTROSE: And then again—if I left tomorrow, under the threat of trouble here, the case against UNUTO would be much stronger.

LERMA (*coolly*): Certainly. But you can take it for granted, Sir Edward, that the United Nations Undeveloped Territories Organisation will not control this island much longer. It is now much too valuable.

FORTROSE: Beryllium?

LERMA: Excellent. It is a pleasure to talk to you, my dear Sir Edward. I shall be perfectly frank. And to show you that you are now close to very deep waters indeed. (*He leans forward confidentially.*) We are badly in need of a metal, to encase the uranium in atomic piles, that will stand high temperatures and high pressures and yet allow the neutrons to act. Beryllium is such a metal, which does not inhibit the passage of neutrons.

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FORTROSE: I shall be equally frank, Mr. Lerma. I shall do my damndest to inhibit the passage of this island into the control of you and your friends.

LERMA: Then you are not a realist, and I am disappointed. We are talking now about the naked realities of power in this unpleasant world. (*With graver and more intimate tone.*) Sir Edward, you run a grave risk by staying here. You are in danger.

FORTROSE (*after rising slowly*): I know that. I've pretended not to be aware of it, but I am. I've even made certain preparations. This afternoon I sent a cable to MacDowell, the Director-General of UNUTO in Washington. There are, you know, eleven of these Undeveloped Territories, and different types of men in charge of them. I have advised MacDowell—in case anything happened to me here—not to send Brattisi—his original choice as my successor—to take over, but Forgenius, who is a Finn—and a tough, impatient sort of man, passionately devoted to the idea of UNUTO and the United Nations. (*He pauses a moment, then slower and softer, but very impressively.*) I have also given to the pilot of the plane that left this evening a letter, a long letter, addressed to an old friend of mine who is a great journalist and quite fearless. In that letter I have told him the whole story of what has been happening here, and have begged him to make the fullest possible use of it if anything happens to me. Then—he will tell the world.

LERMA (*coolly*): No doubt he will try to. But the world, my friend, does not care.

FORTROSE (*with passionate conviction*): If it does not care today, then it will care tomorrow.

LERMA (*who has also risen*): I am afraid you are already living in some other world.

FORTROSE (*same tone*): Of course I am. I'm trying to live by faith, hope, and love. What else is there to live by?

LERMA: And what has all this brought you?

FORTROSE: What has your philosophy brought you? Or all of us? We know by now. The camp at Belsen and the little tube of cyanide in Himmler's mouth. (*He hesitates a moment, then with a more intimate tone.*) For various reasons I've been feeling lonely tonight—rather frightened too, I'll admit it. But even now, Lerma, I don't think I feel as lonely and afraid as you've felt for the last forty years. You see this island as so many deposits of beryllium silicate. I see it as a community of people, who sooner or later cannot help but live by faith, hope and love. I doubt if you like people—ordinary, blundering, messy people—

LERMA (*coolly, smiling*): I dislike them intensely.

FORTROSE: They may be misled today, but tomorrow, next year, in ten years' time, they'll remember, understand again, and be with us once more. If I had time I'd take you round this island and show you what we've done. But there isn't time——

LERMA: No. Perhaps even less than you think. And I must go.

FORTROSE (*struck with an idea*): Just a minute! Here at least is one concrete example. No—(*as LERMA shows signs of impatience.*) I've only to ring for an island girl who happens to be here. You can just take a look at her, and then I'll explain as I take you out. (*He has now gone up to desk and rung the bell for ROSA.*) She's acting as my secretary just now, and tonight doesn't even want to leave this building.

LERMA (*dryly*): She may have more than one good reason for that.

ROSA *enters left, closing door behind her. She looks inquiringly at FORTROSE.*

FORTROSE: Rosa, come and meet Mr. Lerma, who doesn't believe in what we're trying to do in UNUTO.

ROSA, *wonderingly and shyly, comes forward, and LERMA advances a step or two to shake hands and look hard at her.*

ROSA (*shyly*): Good evening, sir.

LERMA: How do you do, Rosa? And do you believe in UNUTO?

ROSA (*shyly*): Yes, I do, sir.

LERMA (*softly*): And is that why you are staying here so late tonight?

ROSA (*looking rather distressed*): Well—in a way it is, sir—but—well——

LERMA (*still softly*): Well—what?

ROSA (*almost in a whisper*): I feel—rather frightened.

LERMA *gives a look, then a nod, and turns away towards door right.*

FORTROSE (*heartily*): Nonsense. Rosa, there's nothing to be frightened about. But stay here until I come back—and listen for the private phone.

He turns towards door right, taking LERMA along with him. As he shows LERMA out, he can be heard beginning.

Well, there's one example. A few years ago—that child——

But now they have gone out right, and the door is closed behind them. Left alone, ROSA is clearly apprehensive. She moves about, tries sitting down where she sat at opening of scene, then moves again, then sits.

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Door/windows at back are now suddenly kicked and VEZABAR enters, dressed as in Act I. He has been drinking hard, and shows it by a wild eye, hard breathing, and an air of savagery only just under control. Dance music can now be heard softly but in maddening regular rhythm at back.

When VEZABAR has entered, FELIPE is now seen just inside towards right of space there. He watches intently. ROSA rises slowly, as if paralysed by fear, as VEZABAR slowly comes nearer, regarding her with a kind of angry glee. When he is close to her, she gives a startled cry and tries quickly to turn and bolt for door left. But he reaches out at once, stops her and spins her round to face him.

VEZABAR (with savage mockery): Yes—yes—I spik English also.

He gives her two very sharp hard slaps, one on each cheek, then rips down one shoulder of her blouse or dress, exposing her bare brown shoulder almost down to the breast. All this must be done with a brutal zest.

So—get out!

He gives her a shove that sends her obliquely upstage right, several paces. She is now sobbing. VEZABAR, relishing it all, slowly follows up a pace or two, to cut off any chance of her running out left or right. FELIPE now comes in a step or so, his eyes fixed on her in eager anticipation. There is a marked animal quality about this youth.

He reaches out and puts a hand on her shoulder or a little below it, and stares at her with eager lecherous eyes. The music continues. Her resistance suddenly collapses. Slowly she allows him to pull her out into the darkness. Amused, VEZABAR lights a cigarette and sprawls in a chair, tapping a hand or foot to the music.

After a few moments FORTROSE comes in right and glances round for ROSA.

FORTROSE (calling, not too loud): Rosa! Rosa!

VEZABAR (not rising from his chair): Rosa is gone. I say to 'er Get out!—an' she get out—dam' quick.

FORTROSE (gravely): Where has she gone?

VEZABAR (grinning): To 'ave swell time wit' island boy. Corabana girl like to 'ave swell time at fiesta—dance—dreenk—make beeg love.

FORTROSE looks at him, controlling his anger. *He speaks with icy control.*

FORTROSE: I warned you, when you came here before, that you had just two weeks in which to finish your business here. Those two weeks are up. I propose to have you deported on the first ship going north.

VEZABAR (*chuckling*): Beeg talk! Fine beeg talk! See—I am afraid very much.

He spits noisily to show his contempt. After giving him a disgusted glance, FORTROSE goes behind desk to pick up telephone. He tries one telephone and then another. It is clear that both lines are dead. VEZABAR now rises slowly, with an insolent sense of power.

Sir Fortrose, you waste good time. Telephone—finish. Munro in hospital. Two inspector—three sergeant—all locked up. My boys in cable an' radio offices. In one hour we take over—all roun'. UNUTO—finish!

FORTROSE: Vezabar, this is childish. UNUTO isn't just a few men and women here. It has the whole United Nations behind it.

VEZABAR (*kicks his chair angrily. With angry contempt*): It is you who talk like child. I am poleetical man—I know. I come back to Corabana because I know UNUTO no good now—an' if we 'ave leetle revolution 'ere, den United Nations do not'ing. You t'eenk I am a fool, like you. I come back 'ere wit' plenty money—beeg influence.

FORTROSE (*steadily*): I don't care how much money you have, or how much big influence you think you have, Vezabar—just consider yourself under arrest.

VEZABAR (*with angry contempt*): Ah—*Dios*—you talk like God-dam' baby. Why you t'eenk I come 'ere now—to see you?

FORTROSE: I don't know. But I do know that I'm going to have you deported.

VEZABAR: I show you why I come. (*He produces a document with something of a flourish.*) You read Spanish? (*He gets up and hands over document.*)

FORTROSE (*taking document*): Not very well. What is this nonsense?

VEZABAR (*with dangerous calm now*): Is nonsense, eh? In dees paper you ask me—Vezabar—to take over Island—to make order an' everyt'eeng nice an' safe for Island people—because you, Sir Fortrose, an' UNUTO staff can no more make order 'ere—eh?

FORTROSE (*calmly*): I see. You're trying to work that favourite trick of all political gangsters.

VEZABAR (*still with dangerous calm*): You sign—okay—you go—— If you don't sign—too bad. Plenty trouble—maybe plenty shooting—soon tonight 'ere—an' Sir Fortrose is runnin' round Port San Pedro—tryin' to make order—an' maybe bullet finds him. Too bad. Finish!

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

FORTROSE: It is you who are finished Vezabar. There is a new world and you can't shoot your way into it or out of it.

VEZABAR: Like hell. So you sign damn quick or else.

FORTROSE: There's your letter. (*Tears it across.*) You are now under arrest.

VEZABAR: You arrest me? P'raps you not live so long.

FORTROSE (*looking at him, calmly*): Even so you can't win, Vezabar. This year, next year—sometime my successor will have you arrested.

VEZABAR (*angry and loud*): There will be nobody. I tell you eet is all finish—

VEZABAR fires four shots at FORTROSE, who collapses on to the desk. FORTROSE clutches the box of emergency dressings but cannot hold it and it falls in front of the desk. In the last effort he lurches forward over the desk and knocks off several things including a large globe, which has been prominently displayed on the desk throughout this act. He then dies, still leaning forward over the desk. The music can be heard. After a few moments ROSA enters from the back, looking dishevelled. She stares at FORTROSE and after hesitating a moment picks up the shawl she has left behind on the chair and covers FORTROSE's body with it. Then she picks up the globe, and carefully replaces it by the side of the dead man. She then goes to the switch downstage left and switches on the lights, which illuminate the two maps. She sits in the downstage chair, as if awaiting further orders. Slow curtain.

END OF PLAY

SUMMER DAY'S DREAM

A Play in Two Acts

CHARACTERS

STEPHEN DAWLISH, an old man
CHRISTOPHER DAWLISH, his grandson
ROSALIE DAWLISH, his granddaughter
MRS. MARGARET DAWLISH, his daughter-in-law
FRED VOLES, farm bailiff
IRINA SHESTOVA, Russian official
FRANKLYN HEIMER, American industrialist
DR. BAHRU, Indian research chemist

ACT I

The entrance hall

SCENE I. Early afternoon

SCENE II. Evening, same day

ACT II

The terrace (three days later)

SCENE I. Afternoon

SCENE II. Night, same day

The action takes place at Larks Lea, an old country house on the South Downs; and the time is around Midsummer, 1975.

Summer Day's Dream—Copyright, 1950, by J. B. Priestley

“Summer Day's Dream” was first produced at the St. Martin's Theatre in September, 1949, with the following cast:

STEPHEN DAWLISH	HERBERT LOMAS
CHRISTOPHER DAWLISH	JOHN WESTBROOK
ROSALIE DAWLISH	ADRIENNE CORRI
MRS. MARGARET DAWLISH	EILEEN THORNDIKE
FRED VOLES	CHARLES LAMB
IRINA SHESTOVA	ADINA MANDLOVA
FRANKLYN HEIMER	JOHN SALEW
DR. BAHRU	OLAF POOLEY

The play produced by MICHAEL MACOWAN

ACT I

SCENE I

The entrance hall of an old country house on the South Downs, a house that was originally a stately early eighteenth-century mansion. The designer of the set can have considerable latitude, but if possible it should have the following features: on right (actors') a large main entrance door, with a tall window at each side of it. These windows and the door, which is wide open throughout this scene, should give us a glimpse of a lush overgrown neglected garden in high summer. On left is an exit towards the kitchen and rest of house on ground floor, and the end of a broad shallow staircase leading to first floor. This should be a fine staircase, but now dilapidated. One or two old easy chairs and some kitchen chairs. It is clear that this hall is now used as an all-purpose room and has a farmhouse look about it. Everything is clean and well-kept in the place, but its original grandeur has obviously gone for ever, and it has an air of cheerful ruin.

When the curtain rises, the time is early afternoon, and the lighting suggests a bright hot summer day. STEPHEN DAWLISH, who is very old, but still a tremendous character, is discovered asleep in one of the easy chairs. He is snoring gently and peacefully. He is dressed in very old patched tweeds. All the English characters are dressed very simply and rather shabbily, though the young people have a good deal of colour in their clothes. And all of them look very healthy, as if they spent most of their time out of doors.

After some moments—for the scene should be very slow in opening, to suit the mood of the time—FRED VOLES enters from outside. He is a man of about sixty, a slow, dependable rural type. He sees that STEPHEN is asleep, and does not disturb him, but sits down not far away and brings out an old pipe and lights it. STEPHEN slowly wakes up, and sniffs carefully at FRED's smoke.

STEPHEN: Fred?

FRED: Yes, Mr. Dawlish?

STEPHEN (*almost accusingly*): There's some real tobacco in that pipe.

FRED: There is. But I've still mixed it with some coltsfoot—about half and half. Try some. (*He produces an old pouch and hands it over.*)

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

STEPHEN (*sitting up and taking pouch*): Thank you, Fred. (*As he begins to fill an old pipe.*) Where did the tobacco come from?

FRED: Frank Waterhouse. His lad, the one who's at sea, brought him some, and when we sold them two heifer to him the other day, Frank gave me about a pound. Some's for you, of course, Mr. Dawlish, if you want it.

STEPHEN: Certainly I want it, Fred. All you can spare. (*His pipe is going now, and he tastes it.*) Not bad. Not bad at all.

FRED: 'Tisn't, is it? I'll bring yours up to-night. You've got some coltsfoot to mix in with it, eh?

STEPHEN: Plenty. (*Sighs with satisfaction and smokes comfortably.*) I was dreaming, Fred. Sixty years back. Nineteen-fifteen—First World War. About the time you were born.

FRED: That's right. Nineteen-fifteen. I'm sixty this year.

STEPHEN (*slowly*): I was in the trenches again . . . near Neuve Chapelle . . . splashing about in gum-boots in a foot or two of water . . . I could see the rotting sandbags, as plain as I can see you . . . after sixty years. By thunder, Fred, I've been through something in my time—and it's all here somewhere, even the sandbags. I'm a miracle, Fred, and nothing less.

FRED: Right, Mr. Dawlish. And maybe we all are.

STEPHEN: Certainly. Only I'm more of one. Is the hay in?

FRED: Finished this noon. I came to tell you. But I've had to send the big cart up to Longbarrow Down.

STEPHEN: Why? You're not lending it to Joe Watson again, are you?

FRED: No. Joe doesn't need it this year.

STEPHEN: Then why send it up to Longbarrow Down?

FRED: Joe sent his boy down with a message that them three foreigners up there have had an accident with their helicopter or whatever it is—and they look like being stuck here for a day or two. So Christopher and Miss Rosalie said these foreigners had better come and stay with you.

STEPHEN (*grumbling humorously*): Oh—they did, did they?

FRED: It'll be all right, won't it, Mr. Dawlish?

STEPHEN: I don't know, Fred. I've arrived now at an age when I've stopped knowing—or really caring—whether things are all right. But I don't mind them coming here.

FRED (*grinning*): That's a good job, because they're on their way here now.

Enter MARGARET DAWLISH. She is a tall striking-looking woman in her forties. She has obviously been cooking, but nevertheless retains an impressive air of dignity. She has a rather slow, deep voice, and a strange, searching look.

MARGARET: Good afternoon, Fred.

FRED: Afternoon, Mrs. Dawlish.

•STEPHEN: The big cart's on its way here with three foreigners—who've been asked to stay here.

MARGARET: Well, I think we ought to have them. The dark one—Indian or something—has hurt himself.

STEPHEN: What's this, Margaret? More witchcraft?

MARGARET: Not this time. Gladys Watson brought me some eggs in exchange for some butter, and she told me. One of the three is a woman—a Russian.

STEPHEN (*grumbling humorously*): Worse and worse!

MARGARET: We can manage for a day or two. And it'll be a nice change for you, Father.

STEPHEN: I don't want a nice change. I don't want any more changes, nice or otherwise. I've seen too many. Where are we going to put them?

MARGARET: I've worked that out nicely. Christopher's still sleeping outside, so one of them can have his room, Rosalie can share with me——

STEPHEN: Yes, yes, my dear. You've worked it out——

MARGARET: As for meals—I'm baking that lovely piece of ham—and a big rabbit pie—and then there's plenty of——

STEPHEN (*cutting in*): All right, Margaret. I don't really want to know. And it's none of Fred's business. Is it, Fred?

FRED (*grinning*): No, Mr. Dawlish.

STEPHEN (*slyly*): All Fred wants is a glass of beer—to go with his pipe. And so do I.

MARGARET: He can have one, but I'm not sure about you, Father. This last brewing is very strong.

STEPHEN: Well, that's how I like it—*strong*. You forget I wasn't born in 1925 like you—but in 1895. I'm a Victorian, I am. And when I first started drinking beer, you could still buy a pint of the best ale—the best—for threepence—and it was *strong*. After you'd spent a shilling you began to feel muzzy.

MARGARET: And what good did that do you?

STEPHEN: Well, you seemed to be living in a better world, among much nicer people. Make it a glass each, please, Margaret. •

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

MARGARET: Just this once, then.

She goes out left. The two men grin at each other.

STEPHEN (*after a pause*): When are you picking up the potatoes?

FRED: Next week. I thought we might all take it easy a bit the rest of this week—after the hay.

STEPHEN: Certainly. Take it easy. I spent more than half my life, when I ought to have been enjoying myself, arguing and planning and running round like a maniac, all to sell a lot of things to people I didn't know so that I could buy a lot of things I never had time to use. Sheer lunacy. And it took nothing less than an atom bomb to blow me out of it.

FRED: Your two young folk are feeling "creative", they tell me. Bursting to write some more music and poetry and all that.

STEPHEN: That's how it should be, at their age. Nice weather for it, too. Hotter than it used to be, Fred, though why it should be, I don't know. There seems to be more and more I don't know.

MARGARET *enters with two glasses of beer and gives one to each man.*

MARGARET (*with mock indignation*): Why should I wait on you two men when I'm busy in the kitchen?

STEPHEN: Because you're a good woman, my dear, and all good women like waiting on men. Now tell *me* something. What were these three strangers doing up on Longbarrow Down?

MARGARET (*gravely*): Bringing trouble to us. But I also know that it's better we should have them here.

STEPHEN: I see. But what were they doing up there?

MARGARET: Gladys Watson said they seemed to be looking at the chalk.

FRED: Somebody came to look at it about three months ago. You remember—I told you, Mr. Dawlish?

STEPHEN: Yes. And I said then I thought they must be archæologists. Probably this lot are too.

FRED: Would a Russian woman be a—what's it?

STEPHEN: Archæologist? She might. The sexes seem to share everything there—except the sexual life. But what about the second chap—the one who isn't dark and Indian and hasn't hurt himself, we hope?

MARGARET: Gladys Watson thought he was an American.

STEPHEN: Fred, it looks as if we're about to entertain the rulers of the world.

MARGARET (*quite calmly*): Perhaps that is why I am feeling rather frightened.

FRED: You don't look frightened, Mrs. Dawlish.

MARGARET (*as she goes*): But I am, though.

She goes out left.

FRED (*glances after her—lowering his voice a little*): She's usually right, too, isn't she?

STEPHEN: Yes. It's annoying—but she is. Well—— (*raising his glass*) your health, Fred.

FRED (*raising his glass*): Thank you, Mr. Dawlish. All the best!

They drink, with obvious satisfaction.

STEPHEN: Have you said anything yet to Frank Waterhouse about joining us to do some real line-breeding with the Guerneys?

FRED: Not yet. Brown'll come in with us, but I thought you'd better talk to Frank Waterhouse. He still fancies that old bull of his—and that bull's not good enough for this job.

STEPHEN: Of course it isn't. Must have something better than Frank's bull. I'll have a word with him. He'll probably be calling to-morrow. (*Ruminating a moment or two—then slowly*) It's funny we never spotted it years ago.

FRED (*rising*): Spotted what, Mr. Dawlish?

STEPHEN: That God designed this island not for factories but for cattle-breeding. I overlooked it myself for sixty-five years. Don't forget that tobacco, Fred.

FRED (*about to go*): I'll bring it up to-night.

Enter from outside, ROSALIE, an eager, lively and very attractive young girl, in a simple but effective brightly coloured working dress. She is rather tired and hot at the moment, but clearly in radiant health and good spirits.

ROSALIE: The cart's coming up with those people. Christopher stayed behind to help with it. Phew! I'm hot! (*She throws herself carelessly down on a chair.*)

FRED: I'd better lend a hand.

ROSALIE: Yes, please do, Fred!

FRED *goes out.*

STEPHEN: I suppose you came ahead to make yourself look beautiful.

ROSALIE: Yes, of course. But I must rest a minute first. And I'm terribly thirsty.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

STEPHEN (*handing her his glass*): Finish this. I only had it to keep Fred company.

ROSALIE (*taking it*): Thank you. (*Drinks, then regards him affectionately.*) Don't you think I ought to try to look beautiful?

STEPHEN: Yes, I do. And if I knew how to do it, I'd make myself look beautiful too.

ROSALIE: Well, you have a kind of rugged grandeur—like an old king or even a mountain.

STEPHEN: Good! Though you've never seen a real mountain.

ROSALIE: I dream of them often. Colossal mountains, shining white with deep blue precipices. Granddad, I've begun working on a new poem.

STEPHEN: I know. The rumour has run around.

ROSALIE: I thought I might try some of it on you to-night, but now these people will be here.

STEPHEN: Then they can hear it too.

ROSALIE: Perhaps they don't like poetry. They're not English.

STEPHEN: Well, we can see, my dear. There was a time when I didn't care for it.

ROSALIE: What was wrong with you?

STEPHEN: I think I was ill. Most of us were. But I didn't know it.

ROSALIE: But now you're all right.

STEPHEN: Yes—except that I'm very old.

ROSALIE: What does it feel like inside—being very old?

STEPHEN: Not as bad as you'd think. You enjoy things a bit at a time, and aren't waiting for life really to begin three weeks on Saturday. And you don't care any more what people think about you.

ROSALIE: Don't you care what *I* think about you?

STEPHEN: Yes, my dear. But you're not people. I mean—people like these three who are coming here.

ROSALIE (*thoughtfully*): I'd like them to think that I'm very strange and fascinating.

STEPHEN: Quite right. But *I* don't care if they think I'm just a barmy old idiot. And probably they will.

ROSALIE: Of course they won't. (*She drinks again.*) Aunt Margaret won't care what they think about her, either, and that makes her so impressive.

STEPHEN: She says she feels frightened.

ROSALIE: About these people?

STEPHEN: Yes.

ROSALIE: Was she serious?

STEPHEN: Very.

ROSALIE: Oh dear!

STEPHEN: Or it may be just nothing—a mere fancy. I don't know. By thunder!—the longer I live the less I know.

* ROSALIE (*thoughtfully*): Perhaps I'd better not bother trying to be strange and fascinating. I'll be simple and natural—and dullish. Outside, I mean. Inside, I'm very exciting—but that only comes out in poetry.

STEPHEN (*with mock gravity*): Certainly. But even outside I wouldn't say you were dullish, my dear. So just be yourself, and let it rip. And you must find out from Margaret where she's putting these people. They may be here soon.

ROSALIE (*jumping up*): Any moment!

She hurries to doorway and looks out, then hastily turns. She hurries out left.

STEPHEN *straightens himself up a little, knocks out his pipe, and slowly rises.*

After a moment, FRANKLYN HEIMER enters, carrying a small light case. He is a middle-aged American of the industrialist-executive type, and may be either the round-bodied or the tall gaunt type, but should be one of these. He wears a light suit made of some plastic material, and a gaudy tie, all in sharp contrast with STEPHEN'S shabby tweeds. In his opening speeches he talks very slowly and distinctly, with great politeness.

HEIMER (*holding out a hand*): Mr. Stephen Dawlish?

STEPHEN (*going nearer*): Yes, sir.

HEIMER: I'm Franklyn Heimer, Vice-President of the American Synthetic Products Corporation.

STEPHEN (*as they shake hands*): How d'you do?

HEIMER: Glad to know you, Mr. Dawlish. I walked right in because your grandson told me that was just what I had to do. Those were my instructions, Mr. Dawlish, to walk right in.

STEPHEN: Quite so. Are the others—?

HEIMER: Coming right along, Mr. Dawlish.

STEPHEN: Then sit down, won't you, Mr. Heimer? My granddaughter will take you up to your room shortly. (*He sits down himself, and HEIMER clearly glad of the rest, drops into a chair, breathing rather hard.*) Three of you, aren't there?

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

HEIMER (*impressively*): Yes, sir. Madame Shestova, who represents the Synthetic Products department of the Soviet Foreign Trade Commission, and Dr. Bahru, who is a research chemist employed by the South Asia Federation—and a mighty nice clever young fellow, though Asiatic, of course.

STEPHEN (*amused*): And this Madame Shestova—is she nice, too?

HEIMER (*solemnly, weightily*): I wouldn't know, Mr. Dawlish. I've had dealings with her before in my business, and she's a young woman with brains and plenty of looks. But she's one of their refrigerated products, I guess. So I just wouldn't know.

STEPHEN (*dryly*): I see.

HEIMER: Well, we've had a little trouble with our transportation, sir, as you may have heard.

STEPHEN: Yes. What happened?

HEIMER: We concluded our business up on the chalk hill there and then, when we were taking off, Dr. Bahru found one of the controls jammed on his helicopter and had to crash-land us. Dr. Bahru hurt his foot but otherwise we're all okay. But we broke the T.V.-com, so that cut us off. And your grandson tells me you have no T.V.-com here.

STEPHEN (*dryly*): No, we haven't. I'm afraid you'll find us very much behind the times these days, Mr. Heimer.

HEIMER (*amused*): Still stick to the old-fashioned telephone, eh?

STEPHEN: No, we haven't a telephone either. When the system broke down round here, we never bothered to repair it.

HEIMER (*staggered*): But how do you talk to people?

STEPHEN: We just go up to them—open our mouths—and start talking. It works pretty well.

HEIMER: But wastes a lot of valuable time, I guess.

STEPHEN: It saves a lot of time, too. After all, if a man isn't worth a visit or a letter, probably he isn't worth talking to. I was in industry once, Mr. Heimer, and I can remember how I used to be surrounded by batteries of telephones all ringing and buzzing all day and then when I'd rush home to try to rest, the things would start, ringing and buzzing there. I didn't like it then. Now, looking back on it, I'd call it just plain hell.

HEIMER: Sure! Often felt it myself. But—of course——

STEPHEN (*smiling*): This is a little backwater of a country, no longer busy doing the world's work.

HEIMER: Now, Mr. Dawlish, I didn't say that——

STEPHEN (*smiling*): No, I said it. Let the people who are doing the

world's work have the telephones and T.V.-coms—and the nervous breakdowns. We don't need 'em any more. But I'm neglecting my duties as a host. Naturally you want to get some message through.

HEIMER (*briskly*): I surely do, Mr. Dawlish. And I've been thinking. My Corporation still keeps one of its small branch offices in your largest town—Shrewsbury, isn't it?

STEPHEN: Probably. But Shrewsbury's a long way from here. You can still telegraph, of course, but I'm told the service is very unreliable these days. I'd write a letter if I were you.

HEIMER: I thought if we couldn't find a helicopter or even a land atomicar—

STEPHEN: We haven't any atomicars. Not since we decided to leave the atoms alone.

HEIMER: That's what they told me down there. So I thought we might hire an old-fashioned automobile.

STEPHEN (*shaking his head*): There aren't any round here. We no longer use them. No petrol, you see.

HEIMER (*staggered*): Not even any gasoline?

STEPHEN (*solemnly*): Not even any gasoline.

HEIMER: But what about your tractors?

STEPHEN: We don't use tractors, either. We prefer animals, horses chiefly. That was a horse in the cart we sent for you and your companions. They're pleasant creatures, and very useful. Unlike tractors, they learn our ways, they reproduce themselves, they help to manure the soil, and now we haven't to work in factories to produce goods for export to pay for the petrol we used to have to import. It's more fun and much healthier looking after horses than working in a factory. And I've tried both.

HEIMER: Sure thing—but—hell! Horses are so slow.

STEPHEN: In this part of the world, Mr. Heimer, nature is slow too. So now we're all slow together.

Enter from left ROSALIE, who smiles at HEIMER.

ROSALIE: Hello.

HEIMER (*smiling too*): Hello, there!

STEPHEN: This is my grand-daughter, Rosalie Dawlish. Mr. Heimer.

HEIMER (*shaking hands*): Very glad to know you, Miss Dawlish.

ROSALIE (*smiling at him*): I'm glad to know you too, Mr. Heimer. Would you like me to show you your room?

HEIMER: I certainly would. And it's very kind of you, Miss Dawlish.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

(*He glances round the hall before moving on.*) I guess this is one of your fine old country mansions I used to read about.

ROSALIE: Grandfather bought it when he was rich, years ago, but now it's really a farmhouse, of course. I've always lived here. I love it.

STEPHEN (*calling back from door*): Better apologise to Mr. Heimer in advance for the lack of all the comforts and conveniences he's used to at home.

HEIMER (*protesting*): Say . . .

ROSALIE (*cutting in, prettily*): I don't know what they are, Mr. Heimer, as I've probably never even seen them, but I'm terribly sorry—for your sake—we haven't any of them.

HEIMER (*protesting*): Now—now—now! You're talking to a man who likes to take a camping trip every year. Yes, sir! Never miss it if I can help it.

STEPHEN (*at door, dryly*): When was the last one?

HEIMER (*ruefully*): Well—three or four years ago, I guess.

STEPHEN (*same tone*): Been out of luck lately then, haven't you?

HEIMER: Well—Synthetic Products——

STEPHEN (*cutting in, over shoulder*): I'd do some camping—and to hell with synthetic products.

ROSALIE: Granddad, you're not to tease Mr. Heimer. (*To HEIMER.*) I must warn you about him. He'll try to tease you all the time. He does us, but of course, we're used to it. There's a marvellous black-bird sings just outside your room, and the rose garden looks enchanting from your window.

HEIMER: It sounds swell.

STEPHEN (*looking out*): This must be the Russian woman.

ROSALIE (*hastily*): Come on, Mr. Heimer. I ought to change.

HEIMER (*as he follows her upstairs*): You know, I'm going to like it here.

ROSALIE (*off now*): Of course you are.

As they disappear, STEPHEN comes in a little from doorway and after a moment MADAME IRINA SHESTOVA appears. She is about thirty, fair, but in the Slavonic style, with wide cheekbones and rather slanting eyes. She is severely dressed in a feminine variation of a uniform, which is made of some light plastic material. She wears several ribbons, like medal ribbons, to show that she has been decorated by her government. She is obviously handsome, though at first she seems stiff and cold. Her English is careful and correct, with not too strong a Russian accent, but it is limited in expression.

STEPHEN: You must be Madame Shestova.

IRINA (*not smiling*): Yes.

STEPHEN: I am Stephen Dawlish, and I think you've already met my grandson, Christopher.

IRINA: Yes. And I thank you for inviting us to your house.

STEPHEN: It's a pleasure, Madame Shestova. If you don't find it too uncomfortable, then I hope you can spend several days with us.

IRINA (*not smiling*): Thank you, but for me that will not be possible. I am an official of the Soviet Government—here on duty.

STEPHEN (*indicating chair*): Do sit down. (*She does, and so does he. Then he looks at her and smiles. With marked charm.*) My dear young lady—if you will allow an old man the privilege of calling you a dear young lady—forget you're an official and take a little holiday. We'll put some roses into those pretty cheeks of yours.

IRINA (*bewildered*): Some roses? Into my cheeks? Oh—I see—it's a poetical image.

STEPHEN (*dryly*): Well, I suppose it was once. (*Now, looking at him, she smiles for the first time, her face lighting up wonderfully. He smiles too.*) That's better. You've probably no idea the difference it makes. Before, it was like seeing a garden with frost in May. One of my womenfolk will be down soon, to show you your room.

IRINA (*who is now looking about her*): Thank you. This is interesting to me. At the university I studied English language and literature, as well as economics. This is like the houses in so many of your old novels.

STEPHEN: It was rather like them—once. Not now.

IRINA: But you are not a lord—

STEPHEN: No, no. I started as an engineer, and then became a successful industrialist, making textile machinery. I bought this place and a few hundred acres of land, but I had to work myself almost blind and daft to find time to spend a few days here. Then came catastrophe and ruin—and since then I've been able to stay here all the time—and eat well, sleep well, enjoy my surroundings and have plenty of time to think. It's been wonderful—only I started forty years too late.

STEPHEN *looks up and sees MARGARET coming down the stairs. She has changed her dress or at least taken off an apron or overall. The two women look at each other searchingly.*

STEPHEN: Madame Shestova, this is my daughter-in-law, Mrs. Dawlish, who looks after this house for us all.

IRINA (*polite but cold*): I hope this will not be a great trouble to you.

THE PLAYS OF J. B. PRIESTLEY

MARGARET (*gravely regarding her*): No, we are pleased to have you here.

IRINA (*as before*): Thank you.

MARGARET: I think you could be very happy here.

IRINA (*politely indifferent*): I hope so.

MARGARET (*softly*): I mean—really happy. In a new way.

IRINA (*bewildered and rather annoyed*): I do not understand. .

MARGARET: No, not yet, of course.

Puzzled, IRINA turns to look enquiringly at STEPHEN, who replies to her look.

STEPHEN (*confidentially*): There are some people, Madame Shestova, who don't seem to be so firmly clamped on to time and space as the rest of us are. They wander on the border between the known and the unknown. They see round corners. They can taste tomorrow night this afternoon. And Margaret's one of these people.

IRINA (*distastefully*): That is mysticism.

STEPHEN: I'm afraid it is. And I believe we used to have some kind of law against it, but now we don't bother.

IRINA looks at him, puzzled. Then she looks at MARGARET, who smiles at her. She manages a tiny smile in reply. At the end of this little scene, CHRISTOPHER DAWLISH and BAHRU enter from outside, followed by FRED, who is carrying two light cases. CHRISTOPHER is supporting BAHRU, who is hopping on one foot, the other being shoeless and bandaged. CHRISTOPHER, about thirty, is a big, handsome, romantic-looking chap, dressed in an open coloured shirt and old corduroy trousers. BAHRU is a pleasant, slim Indian, about thirty-five, dressed in light plastic clothes like his two colleagues. He speaks carefully in a small, precise voice, in sharp contrast to CHRIS's rich, exuberant manner. It should be obvious from the first that CHRIS is strongly attracted by IRINA, who is aware of this and very much aware of him, to her annoyance. This entrance scene, in contrast to those that have just passed, should be rather bustling and noisy, with a certain amount of overlapping lines, etc.

(*Heartily.*) Well—well—well!

CHRIS: This is Dr. Bahru. My grandfather.

STEPHEN: How d'you do? You'd better rest that foot, hadn't you?

CHRIS: Unless you want to go straight to bed—

BAHRU (*protesting*): No—no—please!

CHRIS: Then we'll settle you down here for a time.

MARGARET (*who has come forward*): Sit in this chair. . . . (*Beginning to arrange it.*) .

CHRIS: This is my aunt—Mrs. Dawlish.

BAHRU: How do you do?

MARGARET (*helping him to settle down*): Don't bother about being polite, please—

BAHRU: Thank you so much . . .

MARGARET (*arranging upright chair for his leg*): Put your foot on this stool. There!

STEPHEN: All right now, Dr. Bahru?

BAHRU: Yes, of course, thank you. You are all very kind. But it is really nothing at all, this foot.

He is now settled in an easy chair with his foot resting on a cushion on the upright chair. CHRIS now looks at IRINA, who is waiting to go upstairs.

CHRIS (*smiling*): Hello, Madame Shestova. I told you, didn't I, that you'd find yourself now a castaway on a mad island?

IRINA (*thawing just a little*): You did tell me. But how do you know I think so?

CHRIS: I can see it in your eyes.

IRINA (*stiffly*): That is not true.

CHRIS: Yes, yes. I can see in them the Northern Lights flashing across a thousand question marks made of ice.

STEPHEN (*who is upstage, near FRED*): That'll do, Christopher. And don't listen to anything this young man says, Madame Shestova.

CHRIS: You want your case, don't you? (*Goes up to get it.*)

MARGARET: I'm so sorry—I should have taken you to your room. Give me the case, Christopher.

IRINA (*moving forward*): No, please, I can take it.

But MARGARET takes the case from CHRIS and now ushers IRINA upstairs. As they go STEPHEN comes forward.

STEPHEN: Well, Dr. Bahru, I told your two colleagues they ought to spend a few days here with us, and now I'm saying the same thing to you. What about this foot of yours?

BAHRU: If I do not use it for a day or two, it will be all right.

STEPHEN: You ought to explain that to Madame Shestova and Mr. Heimer, and then they might not be in such a hurry.

BAHRU (*smiling*): I will try to persuade them. But being Russian and American, they have much to do and many responsibilities. They feel they have the whole world on their shoulders.

STEPHEN: It's an illusion, but one of the oldest. Well, we'll do our best to look after you.

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BAHRU: You are very kind.

STEPHEN (*turning*): Fred, we'll go out through the kitchen. See you later, Dr. Bahru.

He and FRED go out left.

BAHRU (*as STEPHEN goes*): Yes, please. (*He now takes out a cigarette-case and offers it to CHRIS, who shakes his head smilingly.*) But may I smoke?

CHRIS: Yes, of course. Most of our older people—like my grandfather and Fred Voles—still smoke, but very few of us younger people do. In our time, tobacco has been so scarce that it didn't seem worth while acquiring the habit. But we enjoy our food and drink all the more—and now we have plenty to eat, plenty to drink—and live like kings. (*He hums cheerfully while BAHRU smokes.*)

BAHRU (*after a pause*): Yes, it is nice here.

CHRIS: We think it is. I'm glad you do.

BAHRU: So very green, so beautiful! So many flowers, so many birds.

CHRIS: My grandfather says we always had more than our share of flowers and birds, and more than we used to deserve to have. But now, there are more flowers, more birds, than ever before.

BAHRU: You do not travel yourself?

CHRIS (*with a smile*): Only between here and Arcturus. (*He looks up to see ROSALIE, who can have changed her dress, coming downstairs.*) Hello, Rosalie!

ROSALIE (*coming in*): Hello!

CHRIS: This is Dr. Bahru. My sister Rosalie.

BAHRU: How do you do!

ROSALIE: Hello! Oh—your foot!

BAHRU: It is not badly hurt, thank you.

ROSALIE (*perching*): Good! (*More to CHRIS.*) I met Madame What's-it—the Russian—upstairs. She looks like the Snow Queen in uniform.

CHRIS: That's it, Rosalie. That's why I felt I'd known her since I was eight.

ROSALIE: Are you going to fall in love with her?

CHRIS: Yes.

ROSALIE: That's what I thought when I saw her. I said to myself, "We shall have Snow Queen music from poor Chris for the rest of this year." (*To BAHRU, who is smiling.*) Christopher writes music. Did he tell you?

BAHRU: Yes. And you write poetry. Is that right?

ROSALIE: Yes. And very clever of you to remember. We only do it in our spare time, you know, but we manage to have a lot of spare time, especially in winter.

BAHRU: You have always been an artistic family—no doubt?

ROSALIE: I don't think so. Have we, Chris?

CHRIS (*who has been humming*): No. Our parents weren't like that at all. It's because we've grown up in a poor country with a few things to distract us. So my grandfather says. We've had to use our own minds to entertain ourselves. *u*

ROSALIE (*after a pause*): I said some of my new poems to Mr. Heimer on the landing upstairs—he asked me to, so I did—and he told me it was hard to follow, but all very fine and dandy.

CHRIS: I call that pretty sound criticism.

ROSALIE: Then he told me about his synthetic products, and when I said I didn't think I'd care for them very much, he seemed quite hurt——

BAHRU (*amused*): Yes, I think Mr. Heimer would be quite hurt——

ROSALIE: So I said I probably would like them if I saw them. Now he's going to send me a huge case full of them when he gets back to America. I like Mr. Heimer.

BAHRU: Tell me why, Miss Dawlish. Because he is an important executive, a powerful personality?

ROSALIE (*surprised*): Oh, no! There's something innocent and lost about him—like a sort of old baby, puzzled but still hopeful. (BAHRU *laughs appreciatively*.) Aunt Margaret said you might like some tea. We have some, though most of us don't drink it much now.

BAHRU: Tea would be very nice, thank you, Miss Dawlish.

ROSALIE: I'll make some.

She saunters off towards the kitchen, and we hear her singing.

The two men listen a moment. Then CHRIS smiles at BAHRU.

CHRIS (*with delicate over-emphasis*):

“Be not afeared; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears . . .”

He breaks off, because now he sees that IRINA has entered quietly down the stairs, and is standing at the bottom of the staircase, listening to him. She carries a small, flat briefcase. He looks hard at her. She returns his look, but with no expression on her face.

BAHRU: Go on, please.

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CHRIS (*with a touch of irony*): Here's Madame Shestova, who probably wants to talk about more serious things.

IRINA: That was Shakespeare, I think?

CHRIS: Yes. Caliban, in *The Tempest*.

IRINA: We Russians can appreciate Shakespeare. And Dr. Bahru wishes you to continue the speech.

CHRIS (*as before*):

“Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me; that, when I waked,
I cried to dream again . . .”

IRINA (*coming in now, coldly*): This Caliban is presented as a victim of British Imperialism.

CHRIS: I don't think so.

IRINA: Yes. But you recite his speech as if it were mysticism.

CHRIS: So it is. The whole play is.

IRINA (*severely*): That is not so.

CHRIS *impulsively takes a stride towards her and looks at her hard in the eyes.*

CHRIS: It's like looking at a cheap little textbook bound in silver and gold.

IRINA (*coldly*): I do not understand what you are saying, but please do not look at me in this way.

CHRIS: I beg your pardon, Madame Shestova. I realise I am behaving very badly to a guest. Please forgive me. I'm not quite myself. I was up early this morning and worked very hard, because we were hay-making. So I'm tired. I'm also bewildered, baffled, and light in the head. Sorry! (*He turns away, making for door out, but then suddenly wheels round, staring at her and speaking with an exasperated warmth.*) You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen—and yet nothing I do or say touches you at all. As if a man tried to pluck the flower of the world and found it was made of steel and ice. It's blue mid-summer here, and yet you stare at me out of a Siberian winter.

He wheels round again and goes straight out. She watches him go, astonished, and more moved than she will allow. Then she turns and meets BAHRU'S glance. He is amused, but tries to hide it.

IRINA (*trying to be coldly indignant*): He has no right to say such things to me.

BAHRU (*with a touch of irony*): No, he has not. But then he said he was sorry.

IRINA (*not replying to BAHRU, as before*): I am a responsible official of the Foreign Trade Commission of the Soviet Union, and I have a difficult task which must be completed as soon as possible. I do not like this place, or these people. Now that they no longer have world power, these people, they lose themselves in a decadent romanticism.

BAHRU (*politely—perhaps too politely*): That is probably quite correct, Madame Shestova.

IRINA: That is what I came down to say to you, Dr. Bahru. With Mr. Heimer we must have a conference, to decide what can be done.

BAHRU: I must leave that decision to you and Mr. Heimer. But we shall have to stay here to-night.

IRINA: But no longer. I must report to my department.

BAHRU: At once?

IRINA: As soon as possible.

BAHRU: Surely a few days will not matter. You are not American, who are always in such a hurry.

IRINA: No—— But—— (*With a flash of feminine temper.*) I do not wish to stay here.

BAHRU (*smiling*): Now you talk like a woman.

IRINA (*annoyed*): I do not talk like a woman. That has nothing to do with this decision. (*She breaks off because she sees MARGARET coming downstairs. As MARGARET comes into the scene*) Where is Mr. Heimer, please?

MARGARET (*with a slight smile*): He's in his room. I know, because as I came past just now, I could hear him snoring.

IRINA: It is important we should have a conference here. Please tell him that Dr. Bahru and I are waiting for him here. Or if you will show me his room, I will tell him.

MARGARET (*looking at her searchingly*): No, I can tell him.

IRINA (*stiffly*): Thank you.

MARGARET: But why are you so angry?

IRINA: I am not angry.

MARGARET: Yes, you are. Was it Christopher? (*IRINA answers merely with a shrug.*) He's falling in love with you, and now, I suppose, you don't know what to do or say. But it had to happen some time to you. So why not here—now? I'll give your message to Mr. Heimer.

MARGARET goes upstairs. IRINA stiffly angry, sits down not far from BAHRU, opens her case, and looks at some notes she has made.

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After a few moments of this, she looks up to see that BAHRU is staring at her speculatively. This annoys her, and forces her to speak.

IRINA (*coldly*): The portable T.V.-com you carried in the helicopter—can it be repaired?

BAHRU: I might be able to repair it, but that will take time.

IRINA: How long?

BAHRU: I cannot tell yet. Not until I have examined it properly.

IRINA: Mr. Heimer said he would ask about communications here. Also possible transport.

BAHRU: Yes. But I imagine everything will be difficult.

IRINA: These people will make it difficult. Because they are no longer interested in progress. They are decadent.

HEIMER can now be heard talking as he comes down the stairs with MARGARET. When he appears, carrying a document case, he looks rather sleepy and tousled.

HEIMER (*as he comes downstairs*): . . . Yes, Mrs. Dawlish, there I was—a boy again—wearing torn old blue cotton pants—and *fishing*—yes, sir! And there was the old creek, with the sun on it, the way I haven't seen it for forty years! That certainly was a swell little dream. (*He breaks off, to greet the other two.*) Well, well, here we are! And Mrs. Dawlish tells me you'd like to talk things over.

IRINA (*stiffly*): If you please, yes. A private conference.

HEIMER (*heartily*): Suits me.

MARGARET, who has caught a look from IRINA, has now gone to the front door, which now she closes rather sharply. They look at her as she stands looking at them.

MARGARET (*dryly*): I hope you will not be disturbed.

HEIMER: } (*rather embarrassed*): That's all right, Mrs. Dawlish.

BAHRU: } Please, do not worry.

ROSALIE enters gaily from kitchen with tray on which are tea things.

ROSALIE: Tea! Tea! Who wants tea?

MARGARET (*taking tray from her*): Thank you, Rosalie. Will you help me in the kitchen?

ROSALIE: Yes, of course. (*She turns and goes towards the kitchen.*)

MARGARET puts tea on small table near BAHRU.

BAHRU: It is very kind of you, Mrs. Dawlish.

IRINA (*stiffly*): Thank you.

MARGARET *having put down tray, surveys them sombrelly*.

MARGARET (*gravely*): I should like to say something to you.

HEIMER (*heartily*): Why, sure! Go ahead, Mrs. Dawlish.

MARGARET (*slowly*): You left us nothing but the bare thorn and our bleeding hands; but now our hands are healed, and the thorn is beginning to flower. Remember that.

HEIMER (*embarrassed*): Say, wait a minute, Mrs. Dawlish. Why are you telling us this?

MARGARET (*slowly*): I don't know—yet.

She turns and walks straight out towards kitchen. There is an awkward silence, during which HEIMER takes out a cigar and lights it, and IRINA pours out tea for herself and BAHRU. She looks enquiringly at HEIMER, who shakes his head.

HEIMER (*musingly*): Don't quite get on to that one, Mrs. Dawlish,—but the other—the kid Rosalie—she's a cute little trick. Started reciting her poem to me up there before she showed me my room. Darned nice room, too—made me feel relaxed right away—

IRINA (*coldly, cutting in*): It is necessary, I think, that we have a conference.

HEIMER (*hastily*): Certainly is. We got business to attend to.

BAHRU (*with a touch of mischief*): And Madame Shestova says she does not like this place, or these people.

HEIMER: Is that so?

IRINA (*grimly*): Yes, that is so.

HEIMER (*confidentially*): Well, it's a run-down, old-fashioned sort of place—and I imagine the folks are just as queer—what you'd expect, I guess. But—maybe because I'm feeling relaxed—I kind of like it here right now. However—(*changing his tone*) we got business to attend to. Go ahead, Madame Shestova.

IRINA: You have enquired about sending messages?

HEIMER: Asked the old gentleman, Mr. Dawlish. No T. V.-com. Not even an old-fashioned telephone.

IRINA: It is very bad. Just decadence.

HEIMER (*with a grin*): Try telling that to the old gentleman. Now about transportation. No helicopters. And the only big airport they use in this country for the strato-ships must be two or three hundred miles from here. That right, Dr. Bahru?

BAHRU: Yes, I enquired about that earlier.

HEIMER: No atomicars. Thought if we could find an old automobile we might hire it, but the old gentleman says they no longer

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import gasoline into this neck o' the woods. Prefer horses. Say! He might be kidding at that! We'd better talk to the young fellow——

IRINA: He will be worse than his grandfather. And these women are useless.

BAHRU (*ruefully*): So, too unfortunately, is my foot just now!

HEIMER (*apologetically*): Now—I was just going to ask about that——

BAHRU: I must rest it for a day or two.

HEIMER: Sure thing! Say—listen—let's just relax till to-morrow morning. And you needn't look at me like that, Madame Shestova. It'll take all of six months to erect the plant and build the camps up there, so don't think I'm going to try to slip a fast one over your Foreign Trade Commission during the next eighteen hours. Hell's bells—let's relax!

IRINA (*coldly*): I am trying to do my duty, that is all, Mr. Heimer. If you wish to postpone any decision about messages or transport because we have not enough information—I will agree. But as we are all three here, in private conference, there is important work we can do. (*She glances at her notes.*)

HEIMER (*opening his case*): You bet! (*Glances at his own notes.*) This is as far as we got this morning. (*He is now very crisp and business-like.*) We've agreed to accept Dr. Bahru's report on the chalk itself. It's what we want. I suggest—and he agrees—that we ship from Europe here all the other raw material we need, so that we use the chalk on the spot, taking it through the first two processes, giving us Mixture B. My Corporation can take all the Mixture B that can be produced here. But of course, working on the usual World Settlement terms, the Soviet Government can claim up to thirty-seven and a half per cent of the annual output.

IRINA: I do not know, of course, if the Commission will exercise its right to a share of the product.

HEIMER: I hope you don't. We can do with it all.

BAHRU: I am certain that on the basis of my report, when they see it, the Soviet Government will demand its share——

HEIMER: And I'd say you're right. Now—— (*glances at his notes*) about the labour force. I had a word about that with our West European Labour Directorate. They say we can still pick up a few minor executives and technicians here in England, or bring in some Dutch and Germans—good steady fellows. But for a general labour force, especially at first, we can't depend on the British. They don't want the jobs, not even for good money. (*He looks at them solemnly*

here.) I didn't believe 'em when they told me that, but from what I've noticed round here to-day, I guess they're right.

BAHRU: I think so.

HEIMER (*with growing enthusiasm*): Okay. Suppose they are. Our mobile labour unit can dump five to ten thousand Chinese on these hills as soon as we give 'em the word to go. Our construction boys—and there aren't any better, believe me—will tear the guts out of these Downs, and in six months you won't know the place. Big plant, landing grounds, rows of hutments, bungalows for the technicians, cafés, dance halls, T.V. palaces, bright lights, gambling joints if we use the Chinks, and—er—

IRINA (*calmly*): Brothels.

HEIMER: Maybe. But you said it—not me. (*He looks round him.*) This old place, when it's got real plumbing in, and some up-to-date fixings, wouldn't be bad for one of the executives. Know a nice young fellow I might send over here who'd jump at it. I'll make a note to remind myself. (*He does—and then looks at the other two. Slower.*) Better not let on to these folks what's going to happen. All for the best, of course. We've got to make progress. Just because they've dropped behind—kind of lost heart, I guess—that doesn't mean the rest of us must lie down on the job—no, sir! All the same—we better not let on.

IRINA: I am not afraid to tell them what will happen here.

BAHRU: Perhaps you will enjoy telling them.

IRINA (*getting up, sharply*): That is not true.

BAHRU (*suddenly annoyed*): You will not use this tone of voice with me, please, Madame Shestova. I am a scientist, and my position is at least as good as yours. I am not one of your servants.

IRINA: I have no servants. In my country we are all free citizens. (*She turns away, moving restlessly.*)

BAHRU: That is not true.

She wheels round, angry, but before she can speak, HEIMER intervenes.

HEIMER (*bluffly*): Hey—what is this? We've all been friendly up to now—don't let's spoil it! Relax—relax!

BAHRU: I am sorry. My foot is rather painful.

IRINA: And I have a headache. I must rest in my room.

She turns to go, but before she can get to the stairs, CHRIS enters from outside, carrying a large bunch of red roses.

CHRIS (*as he enters, grandly*): Red roses for the Snow Queen. Madame Shestova—see how our English earth has bled for you. (*He*

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hands her the flowers. She takes them, and without thinking, like any woman, plunges her face into them. When she raises her head, she sees him staring at her. He speaks softly, intimately.) Now you look as I knew you could look. I had a vision of you looking like that when I gathered the roses.

IRINA (*cold again, sharply*): No. Take them, please. (*Holding out the flowers.*)

CHRIS: They're yours. I gathered them for you.

IRINA: I do not want them.

She drops them, and marches straight upstairs. The men watch her go.

HEIMER (*softly*): Y'know, if she's not careful, she'll start behaving just like a woman.

BAHRU: She has been reminded this afternoon that she *is* a woman.

HEIMER (*solemnly*): If she was an American, my friends, she'd be quite a dish.

CHRIS (*with quiet fervour*): She is better than a dish. She is a woman—and the face she raised from these roses was a spring morning in some strange beautiful country—and I shall never forget it.

HEIMER: Young man, you ought to tell *her* that—not us.

CHRIS: I shall, but when I say it to her, I shall put it better—that was just the first rough draft.

HEIMER: And I thought you meant it.

CHRIS: Of course I mean it. That's why it's worth saying over and over again, and improving every time.

Enter from left STEPHEN, *with* ROSALIE *and* MARGARET.

ROSALIE: Oh—look at these roses!

CHRIS: The Snow Queen flung them down.

ROSALIE: Then either you're losing badly—or winning.

She begins to pick them up, helped by MARGARET.

STEPHEN (*to his guests*): We shall be having supper in about two hours' time, gentlemen. I don't know what you want to do until then.

BAHRU: I think perhaps I should like to go up to my room now, please.

STEPHEN: Certainly. And if you're wise, you'll stay there and give that foot a good rest. We'll send up your supper and anything else you want.

CHRIS (*going to him*): I know where your room is, and I'll look after you. Now then——

With his help, DR. BAHRU rises, and the two of them begin going carefully upstairs. Exit.

STEPHEN: What about you, Mr. Heimer?

HEIMER: Well, we've just finished our little conference—

STEPHEN: And you wouldn't like to tell me what it's been about—um?

HEIMER: No, couldn't do that, Mr. Dawlish. Sorry!

STEPHEN (*dryly*): No, I thought not.

HEIMER: How about showing me round?

STEPHEN: I wish I could, but I must sit down. (*He does.*) But Rosalie will show you round.

HEIMER: Fine! How about it, Miss Rosalie?

ROSALIE: Yes, of course.

ROSALIE and MARGARET *have put the roses into a bowl.*

STEPHEN: And you'll see some of the finest land you ever set eyes on. And remember we're not just living off it. We're living *with* it. We love it—and we think it's beginning to love us. Eh, Rosalie?

ROSALIE (*from the bowl*): Yes. You see, Mr. Heimer, this isn't just a place we happen to be in. This is our home. Every bit of it means something to us.

HEIMER (*with a touch of uneasiness*): I bet you. Well, let's go.

MARGARET (*as he is moving off*): Mr. Heimer—

HEIMER (*stopping*): Yeah? (*As she looks steadily at him.*) What is it, Mrs. Dawlish?

MARGARET (*softly*): Nothing.

ROSALIE (*at door now*): Come on, Mr. Heimer!

She goes, and he follows her out. After a pause.

STEPHEN (*quietly*): Why did you stop him like that?

MARGARET (*softly*): There was something in his voice—uneasiness, a sense of shame, a guilty feeling—and I wanted to see if it was in his eyes too.

STEPHEN: And was it?

MARGARET: Yes, it was.

STEPHEN (*gently*): Your hands are trembling, my dear. Are you still feeling frightened of something?

MARGARET: Yes. I am still afraid . . .

The curtain falls slowly.

END OF SCENE ONE

ACT I

SCENE II

Entrance hall as before. Evening, same day. Front door is open. The daylight still lingers, and the light is a golden dusk.

At rise, stage is empty, and then after a moment or two MARGARET enters from kitchen carrying a large tray on which are two jugs—one of beer, one of milk—some tumblers—some scones and cake. She begins putting these things on to a table. If the tray is loaded too heavily, she can have some of the things already on the table. When she has nearly finished arranging the things on the table,

• *FRED strolls in from outside, at ease and smoking his pipe.*

FRED (*coming in*): Good evening, Mrs. Dawlish.

MARGARET (*looking up*): Good evening, Fred.

FRED: Just looked in to give Mr. Dawlish some tobacco I promised him.

MARGARET: Sit down then and have a glass of beer.

She puts it out for him, hands it over, then perches somewhere while he sits down to drink his beer.

FRED (*after drinking*): Quiet up here.

MARGARET: Yes. Everybody's scattered about. The Indian, Dr. Bahru, went to bed, and I'm just going to take some tea up to him presently and have a talk. Mr. Dawlish is sitting in the garden with Mr. Heimer, the American. And Madame Shestova is wandering round the garden by herself. And Christopher and Rosalie went down to the village hall to rehearse the play.

FRED: Yes, I know about them. Don't forget, I'm in that play too. I'm Peter Quince, the carpenter. But I'd soon finished my bit to-night.

MARGARET: Of course. (*After a pause.*) Fred, I think these people will be staying here rather longer than they imagine. We shall need more food for them. I was wondering if you could find me a good joint of mutton.

FRED: Can you spare a couple of cockerels, Mrs. Dawlish?

MARGARET: Yes, I think so. Why?

FRED: George Watson, Joe's cousin, is killing a sheep, and he'd like some cockerels 'cos they're having a do this week-end. His daughter's getting married.

MARGARET: Is that the girl with red hair and huge freckles?

FRED: That's the one.

MARGARET: She's a lively handful. Who's marrying her?

FRED: Chap who comes from Wiltshire way—breeds pigs. George says he's no size at all—she'd make two of him—but he's a bossy little runt an' he'll master her in no time. Seen him do it already once or twice, George has.

MARGARET: Um—we'll see. Just wait a year or two. Who's making any cheese now? We could do with some.

FRED: I'll find out to-morrow. Had a nice piece up at Frank Waterhouse's, the other day. Oh—I heard one or two of 'em saying at the village hall to-night that Charlie Newman got a bustard to-day on Longbarrow Down.

MARGARET (*eagerly*): A bustard! That would be wonderful, so long as it's not an old bird.

FRED: They told me Charlie said it wasn't. And weighs about twenty-five pounds, they said. Lovely eating.

MARGARET: Ask him what he wants for it, Fred. A bustard would be a pleasant surprise for these visitors of ours.

FRED: It's not so long since they were a surprise to us—is it? Never set eyes on one till after the Third War. I remember Mr. Dawlish saying they used to be here—and people liked 'em better than any other bird for eating—and then for a hundred and fifty years they vanished—just not a sign of 'em.

MARGARET (*smiling*): Yes, and then when we were all broken up and ruined, the bustards came back.

FRED: I know. But what made 'em come back?

MARGARET: Perhaps God did.

Enter from outside, IRINA, dressed as in previous scene. She is smoking a long Russian cigarette, and she looks more human, more at ease, than before.

IRINA: Good evening.

FRED (*getting up*): Good evening.

MARGARET (*smiling*): Have you been looking at the garden?

IRINA: Yes, it is very beautiful. •

MARGARET: I'm glad you think so. (*She indicates table.*) I've just brought these things in so that people can help themselves whenever they want to. Beer in that jug. Milk in that. Or you could have some tea—I'm just going to take some up to Dr. Bahru.

IRINA: No, thank you. Later perhaps I will take a glass of milk.

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(*Sits down.*) Mr. Dawlish and Mr. Heimer are there in the garden discussing. But for once I did not want to discuss or to listen to discussion.

MARGARET (*enigmatically*): No, I can understand that.

IRINA (*rather puzzled*): Can you?

MARGARET: Yes. I saw you walking about by yourself, looking at the flowers. Probably some of them are strange to you.

IRINA: Yes, they are. And I should like to know their names. I was born and brought up in Moscow, where my father was an engineer. But the brother of my mother—my—my—

MARGARET (*prompting her*): Uncle—

IRINA: Yes, my uncle—was the director of a kolkos—collective farm—in the Ukraine—and nearly every year, in summer, when I was young I would stay with him. And now I have been remembering all that.

MARGARET: Yet this is quite different, isn't it?

IRINA: Quite different. Yet when I was alone in your garden, hearing so many birds sing, looking at so many flowers, I began to remember those times when I was younger—and deep inside I felt something—something—oh—it is difficult for me to describe. My English has not been used to describe such feelings, but only for official and trade discussions and negotiation. And now—when I do not want to discuss and negotiate—when I walk in a beautiful wild garden in the evening—and I feel so many things at once—so happy—so sad—so much strange aliveness inside—I have no words in English—only in Russian, which no one here can understand. (*She ends rather wistfully.*)

FRED: No, that's hard luck, Miss.

IRINA: You must not call me "Miss". I am Madame, because I am married.

FRED: I'm sorry. But somehow—you don't— (*He hesitates.*)

IRINA: Yes?

MARGARET (*calmly*): You don't seem married. That's what Fred meant to say. Have you any children?

IRINA (*curtly*): No.

She gets up, clearly disliking this conversation, and goes up to front door. MARGARET looks after her for a moment.

MARGARET: I must get Dr. Bahru his tea. Wait here for Mr. Dawlish, Fred. He won't stay out much longer now.

FRED: Right, Mrs. Dawlish.

MARGARET goes towards kitchen. FRED remains quietly with his pipe and beer. After a moment, IRINA returns, in a different mood now, the Soviet official again.

IRINA: Tell me please—for this interests me very much—what is your position here? You do not seem like a servant.

FRED: I'm not. I'm a sort of bailiff, I suppose.

IRINA: You are paid wages?

FRED: I have a share in the farm. When there's any money, I get my share of it. But it's all different here to what it used to be. Money doesn't mean so much. There's a lot of swapping round of stuff you need. And you work with people you like to work with, almost a kind of family affair. We'd never have got anywhere if it hadn't been.

IRINA: But is it a Capitalist or Socialist system?

FRED: It isn't a system at all, far as I can see. We just get along as best we can. We aren't bothering with systems.

IRINA: But this old Mr. Dawlish—he represents a ruling class?

FRED: In this room he might, but in the kitchen his daughter-in-law, the one who's just gone out, is the ruling class, and in the barns and cowsheds and fields I'm the ruling class. Christopher? On the farm I boss him, but up here he bosses me, makes me sing and try to act in his plays.

IRINA: Is the cultural life organised from a centre?

FRED (*seriously*): Say that again, please—Miss.

IRINA (*slower*): Is the cultural life organised from a centre?

FRED: No. We don't have anything organised from centres. When all the centres were blown to bits, we decided we wouldn't bother with centres any more. Seems to work all right.

IRINA (*frowning*): It seems to me very primitive.

FRED (*who doesn't care*): I dare say.

IRINA: But you read newspapers, technical journals, cultural periodicals—you try to educate yourself and to keep yourself well-informed?

FRED: No. Gave it up a long time since.

IRINA (*gravely*): But that is very bad.

FRED: Is it? Oh—I know what's going on round here, of course. We have a little weekly paper—with plenty of local news in. I have a look at that.

IRINA (*worrying about them*): I did not realise you were now so backward.

FRED (*simply*): No, I don't suppose we do either.

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IRINA: Would you call it a democracy here?

FRED: To tell you the truth—and no offence—I don't know and I don't care.

IRINA (*indignantly*): Then you are politically uneducated.

FRED (*cheerfully*): That's right.

Enter STEPHEN, stumping in looking ruffled and rather angry.

STEPHEN (*angrily*): I've gone and lost my temper. At my time of life! It's a beautiful evening. I've never seen the garden looking better. I'm entertaining a guest—Mr. Heimer—nice fellow too. We begin talking. Then we begin arguing. Then I go and lose my temper. Whew! (*He blows his breath out impatiently, and stumps around a bit.*)

IRINA: And—Mr. Heimer—what about him?

STEPHEN: Lost his temper too. So he's cooling off out there, and I'm cooling off in here. Glass of beer, Fred, please. Did you bring me that tobacco?

FRED (*as he pours out beer*): Yes, Mr. Dawlish.

STEPHEN: Good man! Madame Shestova—beer—milk?

IRINA: Some milk, please.

STEPHEN: And some milk, Fred. (*He stumps a bit, then turns, angrily.*) What the blue blazes is the use of a man trying to argue if he loses his temper? (*Shouting.*) A reasonable man ought to behave like a reasonable man.

IRINA (*smiling*): Are you referring now to yourself or to Mr. Heimer?

STEPHEN: To both of us. He lost his temper first. But I'm a lot older and never ought to have lost mine at all. We're a pair of braying asses—but I'm the older donkey and ought to have known better. (*As FRED, who has already given IRINA her milk, now hands him his beer.*) Thanks, Fred. (*He takes a good pull at the beer.*) Ah—that's better. Don't deserve it, though—silly old fool!

IRINA (*who has had a sip*): This is wonderful milk.

STEPHEN: It's the best there is. Eh, Fred?

FRED: Just about. And I'll be getting along. Jim's a bit worried about one of the Guernseys and I promised I'd have a look at her to-night with him. Here's the tobacco, Mr. Dawlish. (*Handing it over.*)

STEPHEN: Thank you Fred. And thank Waterhouse for me, will you? And just switch some light on at the door for us.

FRED: I will. Good night.

The others say good night as he goes up to door, switches on light, and then goes out. The electric light is not strong and should light

the room in mellow pools. STEPHEN, glass in hand, is now looking smilingly at IRINA, who is standing close to him.

IRINA: Why are you looking at me like this?

STEPHEN: Let me tell you something, my dear. (*Softly.*) I can see the beauty of that wild ruined garden of ours, with the flowers blazing through the dusk, reflected in your face. You look very beautiful, my dear.

IRINA (*embarrassed, but pleased*): That is a nice thing to say to me.

STEPHEN: It's true. And you be careful now. We're impressionable round here.

IRINA (*puzzled*): Impressionable?

STEPHEN: Give us half a chance—and we fall in love. I'm warning you, my dear.

Enter HEIMER, who notes the electric light, and begins angrily.

HEIMER: Well, Mr. Dawlish, I see you don't turn up your nose at electricity—

STEPHEN (*turning, shouting angrily*): Mr. Heimer, we don't turn up our noses at anything that's really useful, pleasant, and won't make slaves out of us. (*With a quick change of manner, to comical despair.*) My God—now we're off again. Sorry, Mr. Heimer.

HEIMER (*cordially*): So am I, Mr. Dawlish. My fault—

STEPHEN: No, no, my fault. And old enough to know better.

HEIMER: It won't happen again, Mr. Dawlish.

STEPHEN: We'll make sure it doesn't, Mr. Heimer.

HEIMER: Fine! Shake! (*Offering his hand.*)

STEPHEN (*shaking his hand*): Spoken like a man! Now let me give you some beer. (*Moving towards beer.*)

HEIMER: Thanks a lot, Mr. Dawlish.

STEPHEN (*as he attends to beer*): We make this supply of electricity locally, with a couple of wind vanes up on the down. I had a hand in it so I know all about it. It's a sketchy, weak supply but it does what we want it to do. Now—try that— (*Hands him his beer.*)

HEIMER (*taking beer*): Thanks. And here she goes! (*He takes a good pull at it, and comes up smiling.*) This kind of beer's new to me—but it's a mighty good drink and it's got quite a punch. You make it round here?

STEPHEN: Yes, it's brewed by a local man who likes beer.

HEIMER (*settling down, expansively*): •You know—I feel fine. Yes, sir. All loosened up.

STEPHEN (*sitting*): Good. You just stay loosened up, Mr.

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Heimer: And if your business doesn't like it, then let your business lump it. (*Turning to IRINA, who sat down earlier.*) Any questions?

IRINA: That man, Fred, you call him. I like him, but he seems to be uneducated.

STEPHEN: He can milk a cow, shear a sheep, feed a pig, shoe a horse, grow wheat, barley, oats, roots and vegetables, make a rabbit pie, play the double bass and sing a tenor solo—what more do you want?

IRINA: No, I meant politically uneducated. He said he did not know or care whether this was a democracy or not.

STEPHEN: That's because it is one. We achieved it by accident. It's due to the fact that we're now a small and poor society, we aren't big and powerful any longer. Real democracy doesn't come in large sizes.

IRINA (*firmly*): I cannot agree with this.

HEIMER (*angrily*): And I say *Shucks!* Now listen—Mr. Dawlish—

STEPHEN (*holding up a finger*): Mr. Heimer—remember. We don't start again, do we?

HEIMER: Oh, no. Sure thing! Sorry!

STEPHEN: Easy does it, eh?

HEIMER: Easy does it, Mr. Dawlish. Go ahead.

STEPHEN (*mildly*): I was only going to say that to make anything big work properly you have to have a tremendous concentration of power. And where you have this concentration of power, there's no democracy. You may have something you prefer to democracy, but in that case don't go on talking about democracy. You know what happened to us?

HEIMER: Well, everything broke down here after the Third War, and then you had the big emigrations that were part of the World Settlement Plan.

STEPHEN: Right. And the remnant of us who were left had to start almost from scratch again. So there couldn't be any more concentration of power. We all had to improvise just to live at all.

IRINA: Like primitive peoples.

STEPHEN: No doubt. Well, politicians jockeying for power and officials issuing directives were useless. They couldn't plough a field or mend a roof. We had to begin again with families and small friendly groups of neighbours, people who knew and understood each other. The man who knew most about the particular job in hand became the boss, just for that job. And we said Good-bye—and I hope for ever—to the self-appointed bosses who knew more about everything than everybody else. Now we all have our own little bits of responsibility.

And that's what I call democracy. You call it what you like. Another glass of milk, Madame Shestova?

IRINA: No, thank you.

STEPHEN: More beer, Mr. Heimer?

HEIMER (*getting up*): Thanks, I'll do it. But, as you say, Mr. Dawlish, now you're a small impoverished community, you can simplify your problems.

STEPHEN: They've been simplified for us. We work for what we need—and that's satisfying and not frustrating—and then when we're not working we enjoy ourselves in our own way. We don't look after machines all day to pay for other machines to entertain us half the night. We find we can do without a lot of things that were beginning to make slaves of us.

HEIMER: It sounds *okay*, but they could talk like that on the Congo.

STEPHEN: I've never been on the Congo, but probably they had some good sensible ideas about life there.

HEIMER: Maybe, but however you look at it—it's a narrow life.

STEPHEN: Perhaps life is best when it's narrow—but deep and high. The spirit expands upwards not sideways.

IRINA (*reproachfully*): That sounds like mysticism.

STEPHEN: All right, then, let's have some mysticism, though I'd say I'm about as mystical myself as a rat-catcher's terrier.

HEIMER (*chuckling*): Well, don't make me the rat any more to-night.

STEPHEN: Don't mind me, my dear young lady. I'm just an old man who's seen too many changes.

IRINA (*simply*): I like you very much.

STEPHEN: Thank you, my dear. Now what's worrying you about us?

IRINA: I do not understand this point of view.

STEPHEN: Well, you see, we've had to drop a lot of stuff clean out of our lives. We haven't time for anything that doesn't either free our bodies or refresh and rejoice our spirits. You might say we have two main problems—what to get for dinner, and what to do after dinner. So we grow things and raise stock—swap eggs for cheese, chickens for mutton—that's one level and it keeps us busy and interested. On the other level, what you might call after dinner, we write and sing songs, draw a bit, act plays, wonder and philosophise in our own way. But a whole lot of dusty stuff has dropped out.

IRINA: What is this "dusty stuff"?

HEIMER: Now we're coming to it.

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STEPHEN: Why, I know now that I spent at least half of my life worrying myself sick about a lot of things that seems to me now so much idle nonsense, rubbish and muck. All that dreary unrewarding middle level—trends of this and that, relations between this and that. For instance, now that we're not a world power and nobody cares tuppence about us, we no longer have to bother our heads about all the ridiculous intrigues of foreign ministers. No more foreign affairs! And what a relief. We no longer have to waste our attention and energy on every gang of intriguers and power-seekers. So now we have attention and energy and emotion to spare for other and more rewarding matters. We have time to love and enjoy life and to praise God for it.

HEIMER: Good for you! But what about me getting a word in, Mr. Dawlish?

STEPHEN: Quite right, Mr. Heimer. But take it easy, eh?

HEIMER (*solemnly, holding finger up*): We take it easy. (IRINA suddenly bursts into laughter.) What's this, Madame Shestova?

IRINA: I am sorry. But suddenly I think—men are so funny.

STEPHEN: You be careful—if that's what you're beginning to think. But go on, Mr. Heimer.

HEIMER (*solemnly*): Far as I'm concerned—and I can say this for quite a lot of us Americans anyhow—it isn't just the power, or the dollars we earn, or even the darned excitement of making something big—but—well, I guess we got a sense of responsibility and duty to the world. Yes, sir, don't forget that—responsibility and duty.

He looks from STEPHEN, who nods, to IRINA.

IRINA: Yes, Mr. Heimer. This is very interesting to me.

HEIMER (*after nodding, turning to STEPHEN*): You folks had it once. Then things got too tough for you. Well you're making the best of it right now, I guess, doing what you can. But somebody's got to feel that responsibility and duty—and get busy. That's a real man's life, the way I see it. And if it takes more than you want to give it, if you can't go on camping trips the way I like to do, if you can't grow roses and read poetry, well, that's just too bad—but there's the big job, there's your responsibility, your duty, just the same. Yes, *sir*.

IRINA (*respectfully*): That is how we Russians feel. But I did not know you Americans felt like that, Mr. Heimer.

HEIMER (*with modest pride*): We certainly do, most of us, Madame Shestova.

STEPHEN (*smiling*): There spoke the sound Puritan heart of America, that has kept it from becoming a vaster and more terrifying Babylon. The old gospel of duty and work, eh, Mr. Heimer?

HEIMER: Yes, Mr. Dawlish. And if you ask me, it means as much to-day, as it did to our folks two hundred years ago. We're still pioneers.

STEPHEN (*sharply*): But you're not—and that's the trouble.

HEIMER (*sharply*): And I say we are—though the job might be different—

STEPHEN (*louder*): And that's the point, my friend. When the tasks were simple pioneering tasks—clearing the forest, tilling your land—the gospel of duty and work did not harm and did much good.

HEIMER (*rather angrily*): And I say it still does no harm and does much good.

STEPHEN (*with more vehemence*): And I say you're mistaken, my friend. You carry your sense of duty and responsibility into enterprises that are very different from those simple old tasks. You still do—without asking yourselves what you are doing.

HEIMER (*shouting*): We know what we are doing.

IRINA (*half laughing, holding up her finger*): Please—please—where is this *take it easy*?

STEPHEN (*ignoring*): I say that, just as the armies of mad conquerors blindly marched, so, blindly and with furious mad energy, you tear down, lay waste, build, set machines in motion—produce, produce, produce—littering the world with things men might be happier without.

HEIMER (*shouting*): You try 'em, brother, that's all, just you try 'em. You could do with some of our products here right now.

STEPHEN (*shouting*): Of course we could. We all like gadgets and toys. But the price we have to pay, sooner or later, is too high—

HEIMER (*angrily*): Who says it's too high—?

IRINA (*as before, but louder*): Please—please—take it easy—take it easy—

STEPHEN (*shouting*): I *am* taking it easy. I say, you find yourself dragged in the dust behind the runaway chariot of commercial production, of your sense of responsibility and duty gone mad—

HEIMER (*shouting angrily*): It's the one thing that *can't* go mad—

STEPHEN (*as before*): It all ends in other peoples' confusion and misery, in a hopeless muddle of values. If you want to throw your life away for the sake of plastic ash-trays, that's your affair, but don't—

HEIMER (*as before*): Who's talking about throwing lives away—and what's wrong with ash-trays anyhow—

STEPHEN: But—I say—don't ask us to do it or to admire you for doing it—

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IRINA: And I say—please—please—will you not take it easy?

STEPHEN (*mildly*): Why, of course, Madame Shestova. Mr. Heimer, you ought to apologise to Madame Shestova.

HEIMER (*rather startled*): Why—sure—sorry——

IRINA (*with mock severity*): You have both been very bad.

STEPHEN: Quite right. And it's high time I stopped arguing. And time too those youngsters were back from the village.

HEIMER: Rehearsing a play, aren't they?

STEPHEN: Yes. *Midsummer Night's Dream*. You ever seen it, Madame Shestova?

IRINA: Once—in Moscow, when I was still a student—quite young in fact.

STEPHEN (*smiling*): You're quite young still, my dear, though I suppose you don't think so.

IRINA: No, sometimes I feel quite old. To-night in the garden, when I was reminded of the holidays I spent with my mother's brother—my uncle—as a child, suddenly I felt that life had gone past, that already I was old.

HEIMER (*heartily*): You'll get over that all right. I can give you twenty-five years, I guess, and I don't feel old—not me.

IRINA: You are a man, it may be different.

HEIMER (*chuckling*): Now that's the first time I ever heard you admit that there might be a difference. You just be careful. (*Chuckles.*)

STEPHEN (*gently*): Often, when you feel as you do to-night, my dear, when you tell yourself that life has gone past, the very opposite is true. Some great blazing lump of life is just arriving—and you're only clearing a space for it.

IRINA: I have not known such a thing.

STEPHEN: Give yourself time.

Voices of CHRISTOPHER and ROSALIE are heard outside. They are saying lines from the play.

CHRIS: "Fare thee well, nymph;"

STEPHEN: And you may not need much.

CHRIS (*still off*):

"Ere he do leave this grove,
Thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love,
Hast thou the flower there? Welcome, wanderer."

ROSALIE (*as she enters*): "Ay, there it is."

CHRIS (*off*): "I pray thee give it to me."

He enters, the door swinging to behind him.

"I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows;
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine;
There sleeps Titania, sometime of the night—
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight;"

Sorry, we were doing lines on the way up. Any beer left?

HEIMER (*getting up*): Plenty. What about you, Miss Rosalie?

ROSALIE (*going to the table*): Milk for me. Lord!—I'm thirsty—hungry too.

HEIMER (*helping her to food, etc.*): How's the play coming along?

ROSALIE: It's in the messy stage at present, and not enough people to choose from, really. My part's Puck really. I did it once before. If you two had been staying longer, you could have been in it.

CHRIS (*who now has some beer*): Of course they could. Mr. Heimer would knock spots off old Bucket as Bully Bottom.

ROSALIE (*wheeling on IRINA, excitedly*): And there's the perfect Titania.

IRINA (*shyly*): Oh—no——

ROSALIE: Just look at her, Chris——

CHRIS (*who is*): I am looking.

ROSALIE (*with emphasis*): She has the perfect lovely strange fairy look.

CHRIS (*with fervour*): She has. (*Quoting with mock anger.*) "Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania". (*He looks at her and she looks at him.*) It would have been so good for your English too, Madame Shestova. Think of all the enchanting lines you'd have had to say——

" . . . hoary-headed frosts

Fall in the lap of the crimson rose."

(*He points to the red roses on the table. She half rises. He looks at her and asks softly.*) Running away?

IRINA (*sitting again, proudly*): No.

HEIMER (*heartily*): Looks like we've missed something.

CHRIS (*smiling at him*): Of course, you have, Mr. Heimer.

ROSALIE: Just think of all the things Titania has to say to you (*She perches on the arm of his chair, smiling seductively at him, then quotes.*)

"Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed,
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,
And stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head,
And kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle Joy . . ."

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HEIMER (*protesting jovially*): Here, wait a minute, young woman. I remember it now. This fellow's got a donkey's head on him, hasn't he?

ROSALIE: Yes, but it's a *wonderful* part.

HEIMER *suddenly roars with laughter*.

HEIMER (*laughing*): Wait till I tell 'em this back home. My—my, my! (*The others laugh, more in sympathy than from genuine amusement. He continues in same vein.*) That's what they wanted me to be, I'll tell 'em. Bully Bottom—the one with the donkey's head—Bottom—the—what is he?

ROSALIE (*laughing*): The weaver—

HEIMER (*laughing*): The weaver—that's the fellow—comedy man. Say—I'll read it with Mrs. Heimer and my two youngsters. Just a private performance *Midsummer Night's Dream*. And that's just where I am—yes, sir—slap in the middle of it. In a midsummer night's dream just where it belongs—midsummer in old England. Don't look at me like that, Madame Shestova. I know I sound crazy, but I'm not.

IRINA (*clear and serious*): But no. I was not thinking of that. Because I feel it too—as if I was in a dream—a midsummer dream.

HEIMER (*with a fresh roar of laughter*): What d'you know about that, eh? It's got her too. (*Laughs.*) Mr. Dawlish, you and I could argue till all's blue, I guess, and we'd never agree. But I want to tell you again—I like it here. I certainly do. I feel fine. All loosened up and relaxed—yes, sir. I wouldn't have missed it for ten thousand dollars. *Midsummer Night's Dream*—we had a little crash and then walked right into it—yes, sir, slap into the middle of it—

He laughs, and the others laugh with him. MARGARET now enters slowly down the stairs. CHRIS sees her first, stops laughing and stares. The others gradually follow his example. MARGARET looks pale and angry.

CHRIS: What's the matter?

MARGARET (*standing still on lower stairs*): I know now why these three came here. Dr. Bahru has just told me.

HEIMER (*jumping up, indignant*): Now that's too bad. Spoiling everything!

MARGARET (*bitterly*): Yes. Spoiling everything. (*With growing urgency.*) But I knew in my heart you had come to do that. When I saw you three together this afternoon, what did I say to you then? That once you left us nothing but the bare thorn and our bleeding hands. And I asked you to remember that now our hands are healed and the thorn is beginning to flower.

STEPHEN (*quietly*): What is this, my dear? What have you learnt?

MARGARET (*slowly and quietly*): Dr. Bahru discovered that the chalk in our Downs could be used for making some new synthetic substance. He brought Mr. Heimer and Madame Shestova here to show them how much of it there is, and now they have decided to manufacture the new substance here, to dig out the chalk, to erect a manufacturing plant, to build a whole industrial town——

ROSALIE (*horrified*): No! No!

MARGARET: Yes. (*To HEIMER.*) That is true, isn't it?

HEIMER (*defiantly*): Certainly is. And why not? You've got something here the world needs, so we're going to make use of it. Nothing new about that. You British used to do it all over the world.

MARGARET *does not answer him, but goes slowly out left towards kitchen.* HEIMER *now looks defiantly at STEPHEN, who finally meets his glance.*

STEPHEN (*steadily*): It's true we used to do it ourselves. In fact we led the way. And in the end we paid a heavy price. After that we had to find another way out. I think we are beginning to find it. And now you come here.

HEIMER: Now look, Mr. Dawlish. If this thing's worked right—and I'll see it is—you can get a whole heap of dollars for your land here—and then if you don't like it here any more—why, you can go some place—buy more land——

STEPHEN: No, I can't.

HEIMER: Well, you're old I guess—but——

CHRIS (*cutting in*): I'm not old, Mr. Heimer. But I know what my grandfather means, and I feel as he does. You don't understand. This isn't just a piece of land, just something to pull a living out of. It's our home. It's part of us. We love it. To us it's just as if you proposed to excavate our bones and nerves, to tap our life-blood, and then mash them all up with chemicals to make your synthetic muck.

HEIMER: That's just fanciful, young man.

STEPHEN (*gravely*): No, it isn't, Mr. Heimer. Those of us who were left here, after you had all finished with us, had nothing but the land—the patient outraged land—a few old implements, our hands, and what remained of faith, hope and love. We had to find a new way to live. Without it we couldn't have existed at all during these last fifteen years. We found that new way. And at last we began to live, not merely to exist. And now you want to destroy it.

HEIMER (*rather impatient*): Sure, you've had a tough time. But you can't accuse us of wanting to destroy anything. You've been in industry yourself in your time, Mr. Dawlish——

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STEPHEN (*cutting in, very sharply*): I have. And now I wouldn't turn a dozen sheep off the bare top of a down for all the synthetic products in the world.

HEIMER (*annoyed now*): And if you ask me, that's childish. And this is serious, it's important business. I can clown around with the next fellow, but, as I warned you when we were arguing earlier to-night, I've got a sense of responsibility and duty to the world.

STEPHEN (*sharply*): And as I told you then—you carry your sense of responsibility and duty, without thinking, into the wrong enterprises. You drive blindly on and drag the rest of us choking in the dust behind you. (*He breaks off, then changes his tone.*) It's past my usual bedtime, and I'm tired. Madame Shestova—will you excuse me? I hope you will not find it too uncomfortable here. We will do our best——

IRINA (*moving forward*): Oh—no—please——

CHRIS (*looking at her steadily*): Madame Shestova hasn't said anything yet.

IRINA (*returning his glance*): No. (*Then generally*) Because now—I'm too tired. And if you will excuse me—please—— (*She goes to the stairs, hesitates a moment.*) Good night.

She runs upstairs. There is a pause. Then STEPHEN moves slowly towards the stairs. He turns at bottom.

STEPHEN (*softly*): I think our Russian friend is not feeling very happy.

CHRIS (*quietly*): No, she isn't.

HEIMER (*rather explosively*): Hell!—I'm not feeling happy either—and don't imagine I am.

STEPHEN (*with grave courtesy*): If there is anything you need, Mr. Heimer, that we can supply, I hope you will tell Christopher. Good night.

HEIMER (*as STEPHEN goes slowly upstairs*): Good night, Mr. Dawlish. Nice of you to have us here. ♪

CHRIS: Good night, grandfather.

HEIMER (*quietly*): I'll just let him get up there, then I'll follow. I might have a word with Bahru at that. Talks too much, that Asiatic.

CHRIS (*dryly*): You mustn't blame him. My Aunt Margaret is a very difficult person to hide anything from. She has special ways of her own of knowing.

HEIMER: One of these rather unbalanced psychic types, I guess.

CHRIS: She's the best balanced of us all, and the one we depend on when things are bad. But she doesn't really live in our kind of world.

HEIMER (*mildly and firmly*): I'll risk saying it again. I think that's just fanciful, young man.

CHRIS (*coolly*): It could be. I'm inclined that way. But even the idea of synthetic products was once thought to be fanciful.

HEIMER (*complacently*): I'll grant you that. But now we make 'em by the million. So they were wrong. You can't prove me wrong. That's the difference.

Enter from left MARGARET and ROSALIE. MARGARET is grave and composed, but ROSALIE looks as if she had been crying.

HEIMER: Oh, hello there!

ROSALIE: I don't want to be rude, Mr. Heimer, but I think you ought to go to bed. I'm horribly disappointed in you, and I can't talk to you any more.

HEIMER: Now, listen, Rosalie, you and I were getting to be great pals——

ROSALIE: And all the time you knew what was going to happen to us——

HEIMER (*protesting*): But I don't see it the way you do——

ROSALIE: No, please. I can't talk about it any more—not to you. Say Good night.

HEIMER: You bet! I was just going anyway. But—well, I'm disappointed in you too. (*Nobody replies. He lingers a moment, rather wistfully, a friendly man, looking at them.*) Well—good night all.

They murmur "Good night" as he goes upstairs. ROSALIE takes a scone or piece of cake, begins munching it, and pours herself out some milk.

ROSALIE: I know it's all wrong, but I always want to eat and drink when something terrible has happened. And then I feel sick afterwards.

CHRIS (*taking something to eat*): I hope you two aren't going to stay up. I feel like writing some music.

MARGARET: Aren't you tired now?

CHRIS (*munching*): No. I was earlier, but after I put my bed under the beeches, before supper, I had a little sleep. So now I feel in grand form.

MARGARET (*calmly*): Because you are in love.

ROSALIE (*fiercely*): With that woman? I hate her now.

MARGARET: She is only doing what she thinks is her duty. And she is not happy. I saw that from the first. I think her marriage means nothing to her. She lives in a cold desert of duty.

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ROSALIE (*after slight pause*): I don't understand you, Chris. Writing music now. Don't you realise what these people are going to do to us?

CHRIS: Why not?

ROSALIE: Because I can't see how you can stand there like that—not caring—talking about writing music—if you did. It'll be the end of everything.

CHRIS (*carefully*): If these people were going to-night—or even early in the morning, I'd feel about it as you do. Perhaps even more so. But they haven't gone yet.

ROSALIE: But we can't stop them going, whenever they're ready. And when they do go, they'll take this foul plan with them, and very soon—oh!—I can't talk about it. But Margaret will tell you what is going to happen. She got it out of Dr. Bahru.

CHRIS (*carefully*): It's not been decided yet when or how they go. They haven't even sent any message yet. Nobody knows they are here or what is happening.

ROSALIE (*eagerly*): You think——

CHRIS (*checking her*): No. I'm not even thinking—yet.

MARGARET: Chris is right. Why should we give up hope—when nothing has happened? Let's go, Rosalie.

ROSALIE: Not yet. I'm too excited and miserable to sleep. I want to talk.

MARGARET: We can talk upstairs. Chris wants us to leave him. And he's right. This is his time.

ROSALIE: Why—his time?

MARGARET (*moving*): Come on. Good night, Chris.

CHRIS: Good night, Margaret. Good night, Rosalie.

ROSALIE (*as she goes*): Good night.

They go. CHRIS switches off some lights, leaving upstage back in shadow, but a pool of light near bottom of stairs—and then opens the door wide. There is moonlight outside. He stares at it a moment, then whistling softly he comes in and goes to some small cupboard or recess, and brings out of it a violin and bow and some manuscript music paper. He tunes the violin very quietly, holding it to his ear. Under the nearest light he glances at the music he has already written, whistling softly, and makes a correction or two. He plays a tiny snatch or two of melody, then stops, moves restlessly and impatiently. Then he looks out of the open door, whistling softly, and then begins to play—very softly, with a mute on his strings—some passages from the composition heard in Act II, Scene II. As he plays, his back to the stairs, IRINA comes slowly and quietly down—

stairs. She is wearing slippers and pyjamas, and over her pyjamas a long, pale-coloured wrap or dressing-gown made of plastic stuff similar to that of her uniform. Her hair is looser and whole appearance softer and more feminine than before. She stands listening to him a moment at the bottom of the stairs. Then he stops, turns and sees her. He comes down towards her.

CHRIS (*quietly*): What can I call you now?

IRINA (*softly*): Irina.

CHRIS (*tasting it, lingeringly*): Irina, Irina.

IRINA (*softly*): I could not sleep or rest. And then I thought I heard far away the bird that sings at night . . .

CHRIS (*quoting smilingly*):

“The nightingale that in the branches sang,

Ah, whence, and whither flown again, who knows!”

Most of them have stopped singing now, Irina, but I heard one still singing last night—a little hoarse and rusty now—but a nightingale—

IRINA: I do not know why I am here talking to you . . .

CHRIS: Because for years and years I have been waiting for you, at the rising of every moon—

IRINA: That is not true. (*She laughs softly.*) No, I must not say that now—must I?

CHRIS: No, Irina, not now. In the morning perhaps—but then only once or twice.

IRINA: Did you hear me say, when Mr. Heimer was laughing, that I felt as if I was in a dream—a midsummer dream—?

CHRIS: Yes, I heard you—and have been happy ever since.

IRINA: It was true. That is how I feel—in a dream. I do not understand myself. What can you think of me?

CHRIS: It is quite simple—I love you. (*Half laughing, half earnest.*) My darling—my golden love—

IRINA (*checking him, gravely*): No, listen please. There is something I must tell you. My husband is an engineer. He was my father's chief assistant and friend. He is much older than I am—a good man—I respect him very much—

CHRIS (*very softly*): But you don't love him.

IRINA (*very softly*): No. I read of this love in novels and saw it played in the theatre and opera. I did not think it was a real thing.

CHRIS: And now?

IRINA (*slowly*): I do not know. I am wandering in a dream—with strange feelings in my heart. All day I have been like a child again—

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and yet not a child. After I threw down the flowers you gave me and went to my room—I cried, and yet did not know why I was crying. All like a dream.

CHRIS: And how is it with you in this dream of yours, Irina?

IRINA: It seems the same as it is with you—Christopher. I seem to love you.

She moves into his arms, and with a kind of slow dreamy intensity, they kiss. After a moment or two, while they are still embracing, the song of the nightingale can be heard from outside. She draws away a little.

IRINA (*whispering*): Listen—it is there now—the magic bird . . .

CHRIS (*quoting, half-playfully*):

“Believe me, love, it is the nightingale . . .”

Close together, they move slowly towards the open door, and then stand looking out, listening to the song, as IRINA leans against him. Slow curtain.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SCENE I

Terrace outside front of house, with large weather-beaten pillars, going up out of sight, french windows behind, worn stone balustrade, and worn stone steps coming down centre. Two exits are essential—one at back going into house; and one at side, approaching the house. The whole place is thick with climbing plants, lush flowers and foliage, giving the impression of being rather uncared for but all rich and grand in a natural fashion, and looking rather more sub-tropical than the usual English scene. The set should be reasonably convincing, as the outside of an English country house in a state of decay, and yet suggest a certain dreamlike feeling. The time is afternoon, three days later than Act I; and it is a bright hot afternoon, a rich golden light flooding the scene.

At rise of curtain DR. BAHRU, dressed as before, with nothing but a tiny limp now, and smoking a cigarette, is busy setting up the T. V.-com mentioned in Act I. He is fixing the controls, adjusting the dials etc. This T. V.-com is a person-to-person television apparatus, worked on some much simpler principle than our television; this portable one is like a portable transmitting-and-receiving radio set with sight added. It should consist of a rather shiny screen, about a yard square, framed and heavily shaded, with various mysterious and impressive controls, dials etc. It is set on a table, left or right of the entrance to the house and steps in front, at a height so that a man standing before it has his head and shoulders easily within the frame. It should be so placed on the stage that the effect can be worked, at the discretion of the producer, either with a small talking film, preferably in colour, projected from behind the screen, which must then be a transparency. Neither sound nor image need be very clear, and there can be various buzzings, flickerings etc., as it is established that the set is not working well. The T.V.-com can, of course, be placed so that it is overshadowed by foliage, and is never seen in full stage light.

BAHRU potters with it for a few moments, then knocks off for a break and to enjoy his cigarette better. CHRISTOPHER and IRINA now enter from side, as if doing some farm work. CHRISTOPHER is dressed as before, but now IRINA no longer wears her plastic uniform but a coloured dress similar to that worn by ROSALIE. Her

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hair too can be different, worn looser. She is blooming and relaxed, and both she and CHRISTOPHER who come in hand-in-hand, have the dreamy pre-occupation of satisfied lovers. They separate on approaching BAHRU, who smiles at them.

BAHRU: You have done some agricultural work this afternoon?

CHRIS: Yes.

IRINA (*teasingly, lovingly*): But I have done more work than he has. He is rather lazy, I think.

BAHRU (*smiling*): I am not surprised.

CHRIS: We English are a *bit* lazy—an old fault of ours—if it is a fault. And I'm not sure it is.

IRINA (*same tone—to BAHRU*): He is really thinking about his music—not about farm work.

CHRIS: It's possible to do both at once.

IRINA (*rather troubled now*): Is—the T. V.-com—— (*She indicates it.*) working now?

BAHRU: No. I stopped to have a little rest—but I think I shall have it ready quite soon.

IRINA (*a hint of sadness*): I see.

CHRIS (*looking at him*): My own belief is—everybody here would be happier, including ourselves, if you found you couldn't make it work—yet.

IRINA *cannot help looking at BAHRU hopefully. But he looks grave and shakes his head.*

BAHRU (*gravely*): I understand why you say that—you have my sympathy. I do assure you—but such a thing is not possible. I must put this T. V.-com in working order as soon as I can. I have my duty to attend to. We all have our duties to attend to—eh, Madame Shestova?

IRINA (*steadily*): Yes. I have not forgotten.

BAHRU: To dream is very pleasant—I enjoy it myself, and last night I dreamt of being in my little garden with my dear wife and our two beautiful children—but the time comes when we must wake up.

CHRIS (*hastily*): Let's find something to drink, Irina.

He goes in. IRINA and BAHRU exchange a sober long look and then IRINA follows CHRIS into the house. BAHRU goes back to the T. V.-com, making final adjustments. After a few moments, MARGARET comes slowly out of the house, and looks at him curiously.

MARGARET: Well, Dr. Bahru, how are you getting on with that instrument?

BAHRU: It is nearly ready, thank you, Mrs. Dawlish. But it will not have much power. We shall have to use it very carefully.

MARGARET: You will be able to see people—and to talk to them?

BAHRU: Yes. But of course as it is only a small portable one, it is very crude. And it has been damaged. Have you never seen the big T. V.-coms?

MARGARET: No. Nor the little T. V.-coms neither. (BAHRU *laughs gently*.) Why do you laugh?

BAHRU: Excuse me, please, Mrs. Dawlish. But I was thinking how curious it is that I—an Indian—should be here in England explaining a scientific invention to you. Forty years ago—even thirty years ago—it would still have been you English who would have been explaining these modern marvels to us ignorant Indians. Now—well, it is very different.

MARGARET (*cheerfully*): I see no harm in that. Once it was *our* turn, now it is your turn. But who are you going to see and to talk to with that thing—your wife?

BAHRU (*sadly*): No, unfortunately. I should like very much to see my wife and to talk to her. But that is not possible. She is not allowed a T. V.-com. This can only be used for official business. In a few minutes I shall try to get through to the head of my department.

MARGARET: And do you like him?

BAHRU: No, I dislike him very much. And he dislikes me. But still we shall be able to see each other and to talk. You must admit that is very wonderful.

MARGARET (*calmly*): It seems rather absurd to me.

BAHRU: Absurd? Why?

MARGARET: You can't see your wife and talk to her. All it gives you is somebody who dislikes you that you don't want to see and talk to. So why bother?

BAHRU (*rather put out*): But you do not appear to understand, Mrs. Dawlish. If you have important business to discuss—

MARGARET: If it is so important, it will keep until you get home. And that will give you more time to decide if it really *is* important. And perhaps it isn't. (*She is ready to go*.)

BAHRU: But of course it is.

MARGARET: Do you love your wife?

BAHRU (*surprised*): Yes, very much. •

MARGARET: Then seeing and talking to her really *is* important. And you should never have let anybody decide that it wasn't. (*Very*

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gently, as *she prepares to go*) There must be something wrong with the values in your world, Dr. Bahru.

She goes into the house. He stares after her a moment, rather taken aback, then with a shrug, returns to the T. V.-com. After a few more adjustments, it is ready to be switched on. On the screen there are vague flashes—like a television set before it is properly tuned in—and there are various noises, including sounds of voices, male and female, talking vague gibberish.

BAHRU (*repeating to machine*): Dr. Bahru for Dr. Rockefeller Chen. Dr. Bahru for Dr. Rockefeller Chen. Dr. Bahru for Dr. Rockefeller Chen . . .

Finally there is a flickering image of a middle-aged American-cum-Chinese type in tropical clothes, looking hot and angry, and with a loud unpleasant voice.

CHEN (*through T. V.-com*): This is Rockefeller Chen. It is very late. Who is that?

BAHRU: Dr. Bahru.

CHEN: Dr. Bahru?

BAHRU: Yes, Dr. Chen.

CHEN (*angrily*): This is Dr. Chen.

BAHRU: Yes, I know. And this is Dr. Bahru.

CHEN: Oh yes—I see you now, Dr. Bahru. Where are you?

BAHRU: Southern England.

CHEN (*fussy*): Where? Can't see you well. Can't hear you properly. Something wrong with your set.

BAHRU: It's only a small portable set, Dr. Chen, and has been damaged. Wait a moment, please, and I'll try to make it better.

As he fiddles with the controls, voice of DR. CHEN comes through without the image, but it is faint. At the same time IRINA comes out of the house, and stops dead, alarmed, when she sees what is happening.

CHEN: Hurry up, Dr. Bahru. Make it snappy. Another call is coming through—very important.

BAHRU *faces screen again, and image of CHEN appears again.*

BAHRU: Is that better, Dr. Chen?

CHEN: A little better, but still very bad. Where did you say you were, Dr. Bahru?

BAHRU: Southern England.

CHEN: Southern England?

BAHRU: Yes.

CHEN: Oh—yes—the report for the American Synthetic Products people. Is it ready?

BAHRU: Yes, my report is quite ready.

IRINA (*interrupting, urgently*): No. No. Please, Dr. Bahru.

He turns away from machine, then takes a step or two towards her as she confronts him. Image on screen is vague, and there is more flickering.

CHEN (*angrily but fainter*): Where are you, Dr. Bahru? Make it snappy. No time to waste. Dr. Bahru!

BAHRU (*turning desperately*): Yes, I'm here, Dr. Chen.

But he is too late. Image and voice of CHEN are rapidly fading.

CHEN (*just audible*): No time to waste. Another call coming through . . .

He has gone. BAHRU switches off, then turns to IRINA, who is looking unhappy.

BAHRU: Madame Shestova, that was my chief, Dr. Rockefeller Chen, and I was about to make my report to him. It may take hours before I can get through to him again. Why did you interrupt me like that?

IRINA (*unhappily*): I do not know, Dr. Bahru. I spoke before I thought.

BAHRU: You and I and Mr. Heimer have agreed that although we are sorry for these people here, we must do our duty. And you yourself have said that their attitude is reactionary, unscientific, and undemocratic.

IRINA: Yes, that is true.

BAHRU: But now, Madame Shestova, you prevent me from doing my duty.

IRINA (*distressed*): No, Dr. Bahru. I did not mean to speak. It—it came out. I am sorry.

She is now sitting, looking away from him. He now sits, not far away, and looks at her.

BAHRU (*after a pause*): I will tell you why you interrupted me, Madame Shestova. (*She looks at him rather dreamily, but does not speak.*) The reason is—that you do not want me to make my report.

IRINA (*faintly*): No—please! That is not true. As you said—we have our duty.

BAHRU (*softly but carefully*): You still say it, but you no longer feel it, my dear colleague. And again, I will tell you why. You are no longer an official of the U.S.S.R. Foreign Trade Commission. You are a woman lost—drowned—in love.

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IRINA (*faintly, distressed*): Please! You must not say such a thing.

BAHRU: I say it only to you, Madame Shestova. But I know about such things, I have a wife, who loves me very much. And I have watched you these last two days sinking deeper and deeper—drowned in love. All of us here—all except this terrible, wonderful young man, Christopher—are ghosts. Now you live only in his eyes, his voice, his touch. You are caught in a blinding dream. You—

IRINA (*breaking in—distressed*): No—no—please, Dr. Bahru.

BAHRU (*with a touch of complacency*): I have finished. But you see, I am not only a scientist—I could have been a poet too, only that was too old-fashioned. I have been reminded of that fact several times. It is something in the atmosphere, perhaps. But what I say about you is true, isn't it?

IRINA (*in low troubled tone*): Yes. Before, I never thought such things possible. Now I understand. It is life in another world. There is no past—no future. There are moments when I wish to die—of shame, of happiness. As you said of Christopher—it is terrible—it is wonderful.

MARGARET *comes out, glances at IRINA, then looks at BAHRU.*

MARGARET: Have you used your machine yet?

BAHRU: Yes—for a minute or two.

MARGARET: And what did it offer you beside anger and confusion?

BAHRU: I tried to talk to my chief—Dr. Rockefeller Chen—in Singapore. But—we were interrupted. Soon I will try again.

MARGARET: Ask him what he can make out of our chalk that will be better than the life you will murder here.

BAHRU (*sharply*): I do not like this way of talking. It has nothing to do with him—or with us. We are scientists—

MARGARET (*cutting in*): And so it has nothing to do with you. You are not responsible—you are scientists. Dr. Bahru, we have stopped believing that dangerous lie.

BAHRU (*stung*): Mrs. Dawlish, in these days I doubt if you have any scientists here.

MARGARET (*sharply*): Then all the better. Now we can all be responsible for what we do, and nobody can any longer say "It has nothing to do with me."

BAHRU (*angrily, loudly*): And that is a foolish argument.

At this moment CHRISTOPHER enters from house. IRINA immediately comes to life.

CHRIS (*easily*): Probably all arguments are foolish. I know mine always are, Irina!

IRINA: Yes, Christopher?

They look at each other, oblivious of the other two.

CHRIS (*smiling now*): I promised to go down to the Dutch barn. And you promised to help.

IRINA (*smiling at him*): Yes, of course.

CHRIS: Come on then.

- *As he goes out he hums a tune. They are smiling and dreamy, moving in a trance. The other two watch them go in silence. A pause.*

BAHRU (*softly*): Those two—they are lost in a dream.

MARGARET (*softly*): And it is better to be lost there than to be found anywhere else.

BAHRU: I am glad Christopher appeared then, because I am afraid I was angry with you, Mrs. Dawlish. I am sorry.

MARGARET (*mildly*): Perhaps because you felt uncertain, and wanted to convince yourself.

BAHRU: No, I need no convincing. You cannot understand what science and industry have meant to us in India. There was so much ignorance, filth, superstition, poverty. I am proud to be an Indian scientist, Mrs. Dawlish.

MARGARET (*looking hard at him—slowly*): And yet—I think you feel uncertain.

BAHRU (*uneasily*): It is only here that I may feel a little uncertain, not when I am in the East. There is something here—an atmosphere, an influence. Madame Shestova and Mr. Heimer do not say anything to me, but I think they feel it too.

MARGARET: This has always been a strange island, Dr. Bahru. It was once famous for its magic. The Celts were great poets and magicians. And the Celts have never died. They were only silent for a little time while the smoke was thick over the cities. And now it has cleared again.

BAHRU (*quietly*): And you cannot forgive me because you think I wish to bring it back.

She looks hard at him and does not reply at once.

MARGARET (*slowly*): No, what I am wondering now—is whether you will forgive yourself, Dr. Bahru.

BAHRU (*jumping up, uneasily, jerkily*): You cannot talk to me like that, Mrs. Dawlish. I am a research chemist—a scientist—with an official position—with certain duties to perform—certain obligations. And I have had to conquer thousands of years of superstition and ignorance—you do not understand. And anyhow this is not a reason—

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able, sensible talk. I cannot listen any more. I tell you, I will not listen—

He breaks off now because ROSALIE enters from side.

ROSALIE (*with chilly humour*): You don't sound to me as if you were listening, Dr. Bahru. What's the matter with you?

BAHRU (*embarrassed*): I am sorry. It is nothing. We were having a discussion.

MARGARET: It was probably my fault, Rosalie.

BAHRU (*rather sharply*): You do not believe that.

ROSALIE (*coldly*): Don't start all over again. (*She looks at the T. V.-com.*) I suppose this is the famous machine we have heard so much about?

BAHRU: Yes. It is ready to be used now.

ROSALIE: So at any moment it will be telling you and Mr. Heimer what you have to do next. Where are the next places you have to ruin to manufacture your bits of rubbish?

HEIMER now enters from side. He is hot and breathless and gives the impression that he has been hurrying to catch up with ROSALIE.

HEIMER: Say—listen—Rosalie—

ROSALIE (*in cold, clear tone*): Your machine's waiting for you. Mr. Heimer. Hurry up and attend to it. There must be lots of other people's homes and lives you can turn into cigarette cases and ash-trays.

HEIMER (*protesting*): Now—don't be that way. Have a heart!

ROSALIE (*with immense scorn*): Why—what would you make that into—a cup and saucer?

She marches into the house. Groaning a little, mopping himself, HEIMER sits down, glad of a rest.

BAHRU: Mr. Heimer, the T. V.-com is working now, though it is not very good of course. But I got through for a minute or two to my chief in Singapore—

HEIMER (*cutting in, sharply*): What did you tell him?

BAHRU: Nothing. Madame Shestova interrupted me before I could make my report, and then some other call cut us off. Should I try again or would you like to use it first?

HEIMER (*rather impatiently*): No need to decide that now. Let me get my breath and relax. I tried to catch up with Rosalie all the way up the hill. (*Puffs and blows a little.*)

MARGARET (*amused*): And why did you do that, Mr. Heimer?

HEIMER (*gloomily*): That's what I keep asking myself. I keep following her round like a lost dog, trying to get a friendly word out of the kid, I guess.

MARGARET (*same tone as before*): Yes—but why?

HEIMER (*exasperated*): I don't know why. I don't know what's got into me. (*He looks up and glares at MARGARET.*) And don't get me wrong. Don't think sex comes into it, because it doesn't. I can tell. It's on the level. I'd feel just the same if Mrs. Heimer and my own girls were here. I just want to be pals with Rosalie, the way we were the first night here. And now that I can't be, because she won't let me—hell! I'm worried to death, can't relax, can't have any fun, and half the time feel as low as a snake's under-carriage. I can't understand this poetry she writes—doesn't mean a thing to me—but if she came out now and took me off to read some to me—gosh—I'd feel a mile high. But no, *sir*—not a chance.

MARGARET (*smiling, cool*): I'm sorry, Mr. Heimer.

HEIMER (*bluffly*): Oh—nothing for you to be sorry about——

MARGARET: No. Except that now you may be haunted for years.

HEIMER (*staggered*): Haunted for years?

MARGARET: Yes.

She gives him a cool smile, then goes into the house. HEIMER rubs his chin in an exasperated fashion, then looks at BAHRU.

HEIMER (*gloomily*): After what happened to 'em—and the way they live now, cut off from everything—these folks might easily be nuts. If you ask me, Bahru, we never ought to have stayed here.

BAHRU: That is what I think too. We ought to leave now as soon as possible.

HEIMER: I'm waiting for a message about transportation. Should be here any time now. What was that about our Russian colleague interrupting you?

BAHRU: It is because she is madly in love with this young man, Christopher.

HEIMER: I'll say she is. And you've got to hand it to that girl, Bahru. Once she found out about love, she found it out in a big way. Ever since the first night here—and what happened then is anybody's guess—she's just been floating around starry-eyed. If the boys in the Kremlin knew half of it, they'd have her off this Foreign Trade Commission and serving hash in a truck-drivers' canteen before you could say *Vodka*.

BAHRU (*seriously*): She would certainly be in trouble, I think. Therefore I shall say nothing about this.

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HEIMER: Hell—no—we'd all better make up our minds to say nothing about anything. Check?

BAHRU: Yes. We must all agree to say nothing.

HEIMER: You bet! (*He broods.*)

BAHRU (*dreamily*): Once I am away from here, I shall feel differently. But there is something here . . . an atmosphere . . . an influence . . .

HEIMER: It's like I said that first night, we're wandering around in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*. You remember? No, you'd gone to bed.

BAHRU (*dreamily*): Yes . . . I had gone to bed, and afterwards I heard the nightingale singing in the moonlight . . . and in the morning there was a pale gold sunlight among the roses. . . . It was different . . . yet I remembered how my wife and I, not long after we were married, had spent our days in an old garden among the foothills of Kashmir . . .

HEIMER (*after a pause, with a sudden effort*): Here, let's snap out of this. We got business to attend to.

BAHRU (*responding*): Yes certainly, Mr. Heimer. Shall I try the T. V.-com again?

HEIMER: Why not? Wait a minute, though—what about the time?

BAHRU: Mr. Heimer, it shows how stupid I'm becoming here in this place. Why—it must have been about eleven o'clock at night in Singapore when I spoke to Dr. Rockefeller Chen. No wonder he was so impatient. I dare not disturb him again now.

HEIMER: Well—let's see—— (*Glances at his watch.*) Yep. If I can get through to my chief—old G. J. Copplestone—it'll be just about the middle of the morning with him. That's fine. (*Moves towards the T. V.-com with BAHRU.*) Let's go ahead and try. Old G. J.'s got one of the finest sets in America—so it ought to be okay at his end. Got through to him all right when we were in Germany—remember? (*They are now fiddling about with the controls. HEIMER speaks through this.*) Think you said you'd never met G. J., eh?

BAHRU: No, I have never met him. But I have often heard of him, of course.

Enter STEPHEN, smoking a pipe, from the house.

HEIMER: Greatest manufacturer and seller of synthetic products in the whole wide world. Must be worth close on fifty million dollars—and is sitting right on top of the heap—except that he can't eat, can't sleep, can't keep a wife, and has quarrelled with all his three children. But a man can't have everything—and after all he's got plenty—yes, sir. About a quarter of the homes in North America take old G. J.'s

news and entertainment programmes. Likes to look after 'em himself too, to give the people his philosophy of life.

STEPHEN (*settling down*): And what is his philosophy of life, Mr. Heimer?

HEIMER: Oh!—hello there, Mr. Dawlish! We're trying to get through to my chief—old G. J. Copplestone—

STEPHEN: Who gives millions and millions of people his philosophy of life.

HEIMER: That's so.

STEPHEN: Well, what is his philosophy of life?

HEIMER: Well—it's a hundred per cent American. And nothing highbrow about it. I guess you'd call it plain thinking for decent plain folk.

STEPHEN: Plain thinking about *what*?

HEIMER: Oh—well—how to work—how to spend your dollars—how to raise a family—how to live. The old man's mighty fond of giving advice.

STEPHEN (*dryly*): We old men are. It's a weakness of mine too, though I only do it in one home, where they can always tell me to shut up, and I'd say that your Mr. Copplestone is still dishing out more than his fair share of advice. However—

The set is now flashing and making noises, as before.

BAHRU: We are getting through, I think, Mr. Heimer.

HEIMER: Excuse me, Mr. Dawlish. (*Into machine.*) Franklyn Heimer for Mr. G. J. Copplestone. Franklyn Heimer for Mr. G. J. Copplestone. Full person-to-person call—Number One Priority. Franklyn Heimer for Mr. Copplestone. Full person-to-person call—Number One Priority. Yes, Franklyn Heimer here. (*To BAHRU who is attending to controls.*) Hold it now. G. J.'s coming through. There's his signal. (*HEIMER now stands in front of screen, and flickering image appears of a thin, miserable, angry, elderly American.*) Franklyn here, G. J.

COPPLESTONE (*angrily*): Can't see you properly. Can't hear you properly.

HEIMER: We had a little accident here in England.

COPPLESTONE: Never mind England. Get over to Sweden to-night—then back here tomorrow night. Get busy. Don't loiter.

HEIMER (*apologetically*): Now, look—G. J.—

COPPLESTONE: Don't interrupt. No time. Need you here. Joe Steinberg's had another nervous breakdown. I've had young Wardle

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sent back to the alcoholics’ camp. Elmer’s down with ulcers again. There’s no dam’ co-operation round here. Take in the Swedes to-night— And get a grip on yourself, Franklyn—you’re slipping.

HEIMER (*desperately*): Now—just a minute G. J. You want to know about this British set-up—

COPPLESTONE: Chickenfeed! Don’t bother me with that. My blood pressure’s up again. American Synthetic Products stands to win or lose fifteen million in the next week. Think big for once—

HEIMER (*suddenly exasperated*): *Think big about what, you old crack-pot! (Appalled by what he has said, to BAHRU.)* Switch it off—for Pete’s sake—switch it off.

The set has faded out. HEIMER steps back, exhausted, and begins mopping his forehead.

BAHRU (*solemnly*): Mr. Heimer, I am afraid he heard you.

STEPHEN (*chuckling*): I hope he did.

HEIMER (*ruefully*): Well—guess it had to come out. It’s not so bad at that. He wasn’t receiving the call too well, and if he remembers what I said, I’ll swear the set was so lousy he mistook what I was saying. But—boy!—I never talked to the old man like that before.

STEPHEN (*chuckling*): Perhaps he was right, Mr. Heimer—and you are slipping. But there’s one consolation.

HEIMER: What’s that?

STEPHEN: You’re not suffering yet from a nervous breakdown, delirium tremens, ulcers, or a high blood pressure. (*With a kind of mischievous dreaminess.*) And it looks like being a lovely evening.

BAHRU: Excuse me, please. (*Makes a move towards house.*)

STEPHEN (*gravely*): Certainly, Dr. Bahru. But one question first—if you don’t mind.

BAHRU (*halting*): Of course.

STEPHEN: You’re not feeling very happy about this business of yours, are you?

BAHRU (*gravely*): No, Mr. Dawlish, I am not. Excuse me.

He goes into the house. STEPHEN now looks at HEIMER, who is staring at him.

STEPHEN: Yes?

HEIMER (*getting up*): I’m going to say this for the last time, Mr. Dawlish. I can fix it with the Corporation so that you can get a whole heap of dollars for the use of your land here. We’re not trying to cheat you. And with any luck I ought to be able to get you enough so that

you can go where you like and live as you like. And what's wrong with that?

STEPHEN: Everything. We can't buy anywhere what you want to destroy here. You can't go shopping for a good life. You have to live it. And it's far better to be versatile—to go from the field to the book, the desk to the workshop.

HEIMER: That's no way to get to the top.

STEPHEN: There isn't a top, so it's no use racing to find it.

HEIMER: It looks to me as if you're settling down to small-time and small-town stuff—

STEPHEN: Nearly as small as the Florence of Leonardo and the London of Shakespeare and Bacon. You've met some of our young folks. What's wrong with 'em? Oh—I know—they haven't got this, they can't get that. But—Mr. Heimer—look me in the eye—and tell me—*what's wrong with 'em?*

HEIMER (*slowly*): I'll admit it, Mr. Dawlish. There isn't one God-darned thing wrong with 'em.

STEPHEN (*softly*): And now you want to shove 'em into the ovens and ash-cans of your G. J. Copplestone—

HEIMER (*stung, roaring*): No, I don't.

STEPHEN: What do you want then?

HEIMER (*producing a cigar*): I want to smoke this cigar—and think. Hell!—you've got me going around in circles.

He lights his cigar and broods. CHRISTOPHER and IRINA now saunter on from the side, smiling and dreamy. HEIMER, brooding, ignores them, but STEPHEN surveys them smilingly.

STEPHEN: Been down to the big barn?

CHRIS: Yes.

STEPHEN: How much work did you do?

CHRIS: Not much.

IRINA (*happily*): He is very lazy. I do more work than he does. He is thinking of his music.

STEPHEN (*gently*): Come here, my dear, and let's have a good look at you. (*She goes and stands by him, and he looks up at her, smiling, and takes her hand.*) My dear, when you came here, you were a handsome woman. Now you're a beautiful woman. If my heart wasn't so old and tough—if it was only ten years younger—why, you could take it and break it.

IRINA (*shyly*): Thank you. You promised at the very first, you remember, if I stayed—to put roses in my cheeks . . .

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STEPHEN (*softly, half sadly*): Yes, my dear, but not that blue moonlight in your eyes . . .

She turns her face away, and then meets CHRISTOPHER's eyes, and they stare at each other for a moment. STEPHEN does not look at them, but we know he is aware of them.

HEIMER (*exasperated in thought*): Hell's bells!—I dunno.

CHRIS (*amused*): What's the matter, Mr. Heimer?

STEPHEN (*before HEIMER need reply*): No, no Christopher—leave him alone. He wants to think. He's been talking to his boss. (*Turning to IRINA, softly.*) You'll have to be putting on that uniform of yours again soon, Madame Shestova.

IRINA does not speak, but her distress shows in her face, and CHRISTOPHER, noticing this, makes haste to cut in.

CHRIS (*protesting*): Grandfather! Irina knows. It's cruel to remind her—

IRINA (*embarrassed, distressed*): Christopher—please say nothing—!

STEPHEN (*impressively*): My boy, there are times when a man must speak plain words, even though they may seem to some of his listeners as sharp and cruel as knives. They may be the knives of the surgeon. (*He stops, because now ROSALIE comes out of the house, followed by MARGARET and BAHRU. They do not sit down but form a group perhaps between two of the pillars.*) Ah—Dr. Bahru—did you hear what I said?

BAHRU (*uneasily*): Yes, Mr. Dawlish. It is true, of course. There are such times—such words.

STEPHEN (*rather grimly*): There are. But—you are still feeling uneasy.

BAHRU (*hotly, excitedly*): Forgive me, Mr. Dawlish—but this is not fair. It is hard for one man, no matter how good his training may have been, to conquer at once three thousand years of superstition based on ignorance. And Mrs. Dawlish knows this.

MARGARET (*cutting in, coolly*): I have never been to India. The only superstition based on ignorance I understand, in this argument between us, is the superstition based on ignorance that Dr. Bahru's training has given him.

BAHRU (*sharply*): That is not true. I am sorry—but—

STEPHEN (*cutting in, weightily*): All right, Dr. Bahru. Let us ~~say~~ ^{say it} isn't true. Let's assume that my daughter-in-law doesn't know what she is talking about, being only a dreamy, fanciful, half-educated woman—

BAHRU (*hastily interrupting*): I never said that—

STEPHEN (*sternly*): Please, Dr. Bahru. I am trying to give you the largest possible benefit of the doubt. (*He addresses himself now to all three visitors, carefully and forcefully.*) Let it apply to all of us here. Rosalie is another fanciful creature, young and ignorant, who doesn't know what the world is like. And Christopher there is only a musical farmer in an obscure corner of a forgotten island. And I am just an old man sitting in his broken-down mansion that is now only an impoverished farmhouse. There—will that do? We are all, as Mr. Heimer has told us, small-time people—

HEIMER (*coming out of his reverie to protest*): Now—look—Mr. Dawlish—

STEPHEN: No, sir, you will have your opportunity soon, but this is mine. All right, we are all small-time people—survivors from a wreck, from the war of split atoms and split minds—who crawled out of the darkness into the daylight. A dark clutter of rubbish was cleared away for us. Now you come to dump the rubbish back on us again. For what? There is not one of you three who knows. We don't ask you to live as we do. Live as you please—and take the consequences. But who are you to come here and tell us how to live? Look at you now—

CHRIS (*protesting*): Grandfather, they are still our guests—

STEPHEN (*cutting in, sternly*): I am not talking to them now as guests. They came here in another capacity, and now propose to act in that capacity. (*He turns to the three visitors again.*) I say—look at you now. The rulers of the world, ready to shape our lives to your pattern! One of you trembling before the endless tears begin to flow— (*IRINA turns and moves away, remaining with her back to them all, trying to control herself.*) One of you shouting the nonsense of his student days, to try to quieten a warning voice that is his and not ours. The other frustrated, angry and helpless—

HEIMER (*excitedly protesting*): If you mean me—

STEPHEN (*gentler, but cutting in*): Yes, I mean you, Mr. Heimer. And I'm not trying to be offensive. I like you. But let's have no further argument. I'm too old for it. Too old also for any more changes. I can only hope that the first excavator of yours that bites into these downs will take my bones between its teeth.

He goes back into the house. A long pause.

ROSALIE (*quietly*): There isn't any more to say. There's your machine. Tell it to set all the other machines into motion. Hurry up, Mr. Heimer—you must be wasting valuable time.

HEIMER: Nobody knows but us whether that T. V.-com's working or not. We can stall on that. And we don't know yet when we can get away from here.

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MARGARET (*calmly*): You will know quite soon.

HEIMER: Why—have you heard something?

MARGARET: Yes—in my own way. Though Dr. Bahru would say that is quite impossible—more ignorance and superstition—

BAHRU: No, please—this is something quite different—

FRED *now enters from the house, but hesitates.*

HEIMER: All the same I doubt it.

CHRIS: I wouldn't if I were you. (*Noticing FRED.*) What is it, Fred?

FRED: It's a message for Mr. Heimer. Came to the post office—and Margery Briggs asked me to bring it up.

He has a note in his hand and comes forward to give it to HEIMER, who is now standing up. HEIMER takes it and reads it. FRED withdraws.

HEIMER (*after reading it*): Transport. We move off to-night—to make the airport early in the morning. They're sending an atomicar from Shrewsbury, and it ought to be here between eleven and twelve to-night. So—that's that.

CHRIS (*eagerly*): Irina—

IRINA (*firmly*): No, please, Christopher. Afterwards—soon—we can talk, but now I must talk with Mr. Heimer and Dr. Bahru.

MARGARET: Come on, Christopher—Rosalie.

ROSALIE (*preparing to go, warningly*): Mr. Heimer!

HEIMER (*almost groaning*): I know. I know. (CHRISTOPHER, MARGARET and ROSALIE go into the house. The three who are left draw nearer each other. The atmosphere is weighty. After a pause, uneasily) Well—here it is.

IRINA (*gravely*): I should like to speak first, if you please.

HEIMER: Go ahead!

IRINA: You will soon see why I wish to speak first. For you two this affair of the chalk here is simply a matter of business. For me it is something different, more serious. Not because the chalk is really important to us Russians—I think it is not—but because I am a Russian official here on an official duty. And if it should be discovered that I have not carried out my duty properly—the result would be very serious for me. Even if it should not be discovered, I would wish to resign from the Commission—

HEIMER (*cutting in*): Now wait. Let's put a few cards on the table. You and this boy Christopher are crazy about each other—aren't you?

IRINA (*very quietly*): Yes. We are in love.

HEIMER: Okay. Then why go back to Russia at all? Why don't you stay here?

IRINA: That is not possible. There is a very strict rule against it. I would be sent back. There might be trouble too for my family.

BAHRU: That is true.

HEIMER: Too bad.

IRINA (*proudly*): Besides, that is not how I wish to behave. I am not afraid to ask permission to retire, but I will not hide and tell lies. I am a woman, yes—with all a woman's feeling, but I am also a good citizen of my state—proud of being a Russian.

HEIMER: Well, that's up to you. Now you've made the point that this business of ours is all very serious for you, because you're a Soviet official on duty. So what, Madame Shestova?

BAHRU (*gloomily*): She is reminding me that we must not weaken now, whatever we may be feeling.

HEIMER (*irritably*): All right—who wants to weaken? I know my duty as well as you folks do.

BAHRU: Yes, yes, Mr. Heimer. I was not suggesting you didn't. We are all agreed upon what we must do.

HEIMER (*gloomily irritable*): Okay—okay—we're all agreed—so you needn't go on and on about it—

IRINA (*urgently*): No, no, you do not understand. (*They stare at her. Quietly now*) That is why I wished to speak first—to show you what I feel although I take so much the greater risk. (*She pauses, then looks gravely from one to the other.*) Mr. Heimer—Dr. Bahru—we cannot bring unhappiness to these people. Let us leave them as we found them. The decision rests with us. You have not yet made your report, Dr. Bahru?

BAHRU: No, not yet.

IRINA: And you, Mr. Heimer. You spoke to America—to your Corporation?

HEIMER: Yep. But I wasn't allowed to say anything. Too busy taking orders—get to Sweden—then get back home.

IRINA (*lighting up*): Then let us say we cannot make our synthetic substance here.

BAHRU: My early report was favourable, but that doesn't matter. The final decision rests with Mr. Heimer.

They both look anxiously at him. He thinks a moment or two, with a completely blank face. Then a slow grin lights up his face.

HEIMER: Okay—let's leave 'em as we found 'em. (*Suddenly decisive*

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now.) We'll get through to the Corporation again—and I'll pass the word along to old G. J. and the boys that I'm moving out to-night and flying in the morning—and that there's nothing doing here. The stuff's not too promising—the conditions aren't right—and the natives are hostile. (*IRINA has collapsed into a seat and is quietly crying. HEIMER turns to BAHRU.*) Let's get going with the T. V.-com. (*BAHRU moves to T. V.-com. HEIMER turns to IRINA.*) Don't cry. Don't cry. Everything's going to be fine.

He joins BAHRU at T. V.-com.

IRINA (*through her tears*): Yes. Everything's going to be fine.

As the curtain comes down she is still crying quietly and the two men are busy at the controls of the T. V.-com.

END OF SCENE ONE

ACT II

SCENE II

Scene as before. Night of the same day. The scene is lit by soft but fairly bright moonlight, coming from the front. French windows into house are open, and behind is a rather dim illumination, suggesting that there is one small light in the room behind windows and that people are assembled in further part of the house. At rise of curtain, which the music can anticipate for a few moments—it is suggested that music behind begins as soon as house lights are down and that curtain is delayed some moments for audience to be quiet—

MARGARET is discovered leaning against one of the pillars listening to the music. This music, which was what CHRISTOPHER was beginning to play at the end of Act I, is for violin and a wood-wind instrument—possibly oboe or cor anglais—and should have an English pastoral feeling and great tenderness. It can be heard clearly but rather distantly, and it should be so presented to the audience that they feel it is an essential part of the scene before them but not itself a performance. After a minute or two of this, with MARGARET listening motionless, while the music continues towards its end, FRED emerges quietly from the house, carrying the guests' bags seen in Act I, Scene I. He puts these down quietly in a place where they will not be in the way of exits and entrances from terrace to house; and then stands, possibly leaning against another pillar, not far from MARGARET. They speak quietly, but must cut clearly through the fading music.

MARGARET (*slow, easy tone*): Is everything there, Fred?

FRED (*same tone*): Everything that was left at the top of the stairs, as you said.

MARGARET: They'll be ready to go, then, as soon as the car comes for them?

FRED: Yes. Back to where they came from, and not going to do us any harm after all. Did you hear me give a cheer when they told us? (*There is a pause, during which the music, very soft now, can be heard. They listen to it and stare out at the night.*) Beautiful night, Mrs. Dawlish.

MARGARET (*dreamily*): It has a bloom on it like a ripe plum. A lovely summer night with the moon at full, and everything made of

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blue silk, dark green velvet, and silver . . . and all so gentle and calm.

FRED: That's it. Rests a man just to look at it.

MARGARET: In the daytime when you're busy and the light's so sharp and the clocks are ticking in your ears, only the living are real and alive, and the dead are dead-and-gone and more than half forgotten. But while I was standing here, listening to the music, I remembered them all, and then they weren't dead-and-gone, but all here, very close, listening as I was.

FRED (*after a pause*): We don't know very much—for certain, do we?

MARGARET (*slowly*): No, Fred, we don't know very much. And the best knowledge we have is in our hearts and not in our heads. I think that's something we're beginning to understand again. Our hearts are older and wiser than our heads.

FRED: When I was young we were a cocky lot—thought we knew everything—and sat about in air-raid shelters proving it. But we had a lesson or two coming to us.

MARGARET (*after a pause, looking off*): What's that?

FRED (*looking where she is looking*): Did you see something?

MARGARET: Yes, a great white light flashing in the valley.

FRED (*looking*): Where?

MARGARET: It's lost among the trees. There you are!

FRED: That'll be the car that's been sent for 'em. It's about time for it. They'll be twisting and turning down by Five Lanes—trying to find this house. I'd better go down. Everybody in the village'll be in bed and asleep now.

MARGARET: Go on then, Fred.

He goes off. She is left alone for a moment or two, staring after him and at the flashing light. The music has finished now. ROSALIE and HEIMER now come out of the house.

ROSALIE: You should have listened to the music.

MARGARET: I heard it out here. It came out into the wide night for me. Look at the light down there—turning and flashing among the lanes.

They look in the direction she indicates.

ROSALIE: It's the rolling eyeball of a great beast, angry and blind.

HEIMER: Maybe. But I'll bet it's our transportation—looking for us.

MARGARET: That's what Fred thinks. He's just gone down to direct them here.

ROSALIE: Glaring and lost—that's what it is. And that's what you'll be soon, Mr. Heimer.

HEIMER: Now I'll tell you something. For all my big talk about camps an' fishing an' a boy's long afternoons, about taking it easy an' relaxing with you folks, I want to be on the move again, to go places, to tear right into the job, to get some action, and maybe find a tough fight or two on my hands. And I say—that's a man's life.

MARGARET: It's one kind of man's life. And I like a fighter myself.

ROSALIE (*rather shocked*): Aunt Margaret!

HEIMER (*delighted*): Why—say—Mrs. Dawlish—I could kiss you for that.

MARGARET (*demurely*): Well, Mr. Heimer, seeing that you're leaving us—— (*She lifts her face and waits for it.*)

HEIMER (*delighted*): No fooling! (*He gives her a hearty kiss, which she accepts demurely. Then he turns triumphantly to ROSALIE, who has watched them with amusement.*) What do you know about that?

ROSALIE: You're getting out of hand now that your famous "transportation" has nearly arrived. All right—go places and get some action. But don't try and make other people run away from themselves. Don't choke them with your dust.

HEIMER (*wonderingly, half humorous*): Beats me why I have to take all this from you. You're only a kid. You've been nowhere. You've done nothing. But I let you bawl me out as if you were my grandmother and they'd just given you the Nobel Prize. Will anybody tell me why?

MARGARET: I must see if anything's wanted in the house. But I'll tell you why, Mr. Heimer. Any girl is old enough to talk to you like a grandmother, because the way you like to behave, tearing about and plotting and being important about things that don't really matter—puts you at about ten or eleven years old.

HEIMER (*humorously indignant*): Whoa—steady!

MARGARET (*smiling*): Little boys of that age are delightful—in their place.

She goes into the house. ROSALIE and HEIMER are silent a moment, looking out at the night. They can sit down now.

HEIMER (*with a sigh*): Certainly is a swell night.

ROSALIE: It certainly is.

HEIMER: Shall I tell you something—the real truth about myself——?

ROSALIE: I wish you would.

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HEIMER: Don't get me wrong, Rosalie. When I've talked about duty and responsibility and doing a big job for the hell of it, I've meant what I said——

ROSALIE: Yes, I know you have.

HEIMER (*slowly, confidentially*): But there's something else—that's kept me on the run, brought me a couple of million dollars, made me one of the chief executives of one of the biggest businesses in the world. It's the hollow place in the middle.

ROSALIE (*puzzled*): The hollow place?

HEIMER: Right bang in the middle of things—a hollow place—just where there ought to be something lasting and good. You get through to it, and there's nothing but a tray full of cigarette butts, empty bottles, stale sandwiches, fellows yawning over the last story, some woman giving you one of their queer looks, cold daylight coming round the curtains, a hang-over, and just a dead hollow place where there ought to have been something. You give it one look—and—hell!—you're on the run again.

ROSALIE: Because you think that next time it will be better . . .

HEIMER: Check! So next time you come back with a bigger deal all tied up, with everything bigger and brighter and better, and you think that there you'll be the happy boy, leading the life of Reilly. But no. Sooner or later the party won't stay alive, the liquor gives out or turns to acid in your guts, all the women look fat and sleepy or thin and angry, and—hell's bells!—there it is again, the dead cold hollow place in the middle. You think it's New York that's doing it, so you try California. Then you think it's the Coast that's wrong, so you try the desert or the mountains. Then you go back to the old hometown and the real folks, but it's there waiting for you just the same—the big dead spot, the ash-can a thousand miles deep where nothing moves, nothing grows, nothing lives. (*He pauses, then almost angrily*). You don't know what I'm talking about, but wait till you're older.

ROSALIE: I am older.

HEIMER (*almost angrily*): And that's another thing—the way the women take it. They look at you as if it's all your fault, as if it had nothing to do with them, as if you'd promised them something different and had fallen down on it.

ROSALIE: Perhaps they're feeling what one of our English poets felt when he wrote:

“I, a stranger and afraid
In a world I never made . . .”
poet should have stopped belly-aching and gone out
| the world. That's what we've done, haven't we?

ROSALIE: Have you?

HEIMER: Now you're giving me just the same kind of look—— Oh, I get you. If we think we've made our world, then what are we beefing about? Well, I never pretended to know all the answers. (*Pauses a moment, then looks at her.*) What are you thinking about, young Rosalie?

ROSALIE: There was a moment to-night, when Christopher was playing, when it was as if we had all broken through into a larger and different sort of time, like that of a clear happy dream. . . . Everybody there was so completely and wonderfully themselves . . . and everything, from the light on a hand to the shadows on the wall, was so inevitable and satisfying and right . . . that my heart nearly burst with joy . . .

HEIMER (*wonderingly*): I was in that . . . ?

ROSALIE: Yes, of course. We were all in it.

HEIMER: And all right and happy?

ROSALIE: We were more than that. We were like demi-gods. We sat by the fountains of wonder and glory. (*She pauses for a moment, looking at the night.*) Now of course it's different. A curtain has come down. Soon we shall be dwarfs shouting Good-bye . . . midgets waving under the cold moon . . .

They stand there in silence for a few moments, during which CHRISTOPHER'S violin, distantly from within the house, can be heard playing a phrase with great tenderness: Then MARGARET, BAHRU and STEPHEN come out of the house.

BAHRU (*as if continuing a talk*): Here it is small and almost empty of people, and there is room for your charming and poetical fancies. But my country is vast and contains hundreds and hundreds of millions of people not very different from myself, and without science I should go mad. Or else I would persuade myself, as our religious men used to do, that none of it is real, all an illusion, a dream.

MARGARET (*smiling*): Then you return to your science and leave me to my fancies, as you call them. And one of them is that we men and women are part of a great procession of beings, many of them infinitely stronger and wiser and more beautiful than we are.

BAHRU: But where are they—these beings? I cannot touch them. I cannot hear them. I cannot see them.

MARGARET: How many insects are there in your jungles that know anything about the Chemical Research Department of the South Asia Federation?

BAHRU: It is not the same thing. Mr. Dawlish, I appeal to you——

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STEPHEN: Don't appeal to me. I ought to be in bed, and if I'm to be kept up talking, then I'll choose my own topics.

HEIMER (*chuckling*): You're a character.

STEPHEN: Of course I'm a character. And when I was your age and as busy as you are, I was a pretty bad character. It's only since I've become an old man of the ruins I'm turning into a good character. But I'll say this, Dr. Bahru, I'm not in favour of taking away your test-tubes and retorts, and I'm equally not in favour of bullying Margaret out of her angels and goddesses. Help yourself, I say—the world of ideas and images is rich enough, so take what you need out of it. Where's this car that's coming for you important persons?

HEIMER: Down there somewhere, I guess.

ROSALIE: If you look, you'll see a great glaring light.

STEPHEN: I don't want to see a great glaring light. I've seen too many already. What I'd like to see is the small and quiet illumination of wisdom.

MARGARET: You are too impatient to see it.

STEPHEN: Don't lecture me, woman, but instruct the visitors, who are about to go.

BAHRU: And go—as friends?

MARGARET: But of course, Dr. Bahru.

HEIMER: I'm not going to forget this in a hurry. And Mrs. Heimer and the girls are going to hear plenty about you folks.

STEPHEN: Well, come back here when you can. You too, Dr. Bahru. Come in Spring when the primroses are out. Come in Autumn when the apples are ripe. We'll have a bit of magic ready for you whenever you come.

HEIMER: I'll bet!

STEPHEN: And in the meantime, gentlemen, accept our thanks. And God be with you.

MARGARET: You don't know anything about God.

STEPHEN: I've never pretended to, my dear. But man is a god-worshipping creature, and if he doesn't choose to worship a mysterious universal power of goodness and love, then he'll find something else—and something much worse—to adore. The State, which is about as sensible as making a god out of the local gasworks. Business, which asks you to adore dividends and bank balances. Science, which means that a man's mind worships one bit of itself—idiotic! Or the devil himself, who can easily masquerade as God—

BAHRU: But there is no devil.

STEPHEN (*in a sharp ringing tone*): Stupidity and Pride, booted and spurred in power, are the devil—and for sixty years I watched his temples and instruments multiply, until a thousand cities vanished in flame and dust and a hundred million bodies were consumed in agony upon his altar—

There is a rushing sound, suggesting a very fast powerful vehicle and then a great white glare, like a searchlight is seen off. All turn, and ROSALIE gives a sharp little scream. Then a huge harsh voice—much amplified—is heard.

VOICE (*off left*): All right, folks. Ready when you are. Let's go.

STEPHEN (*quietly*): Don't be alarmed. It's only civilisation catching up with us again. (FRED *enters from side where light is.*) Is that you, Fred?

FRED (*approaching*): Yes, Mr. Dawlish. I came up with the car.

STEPHEN: All right, Fred. Tell Madame Shestova and Christopher that the car is here.

FRED *goes into the house.*

HEIMER (*heartily*): Well, this is it. We've got all the baggage out here, I guess.

BAHRU (*picking up some bags*): Yes, the baggage is here.

HEIMER (*as he sorts out bags with BAHRU*): It's tough luck on those two. We ought to leave 'em alone a minute. Whichever way they work it—might be quite a time before they can meet again.

MARGARET (*calmly but impressively*): They will not meet again for thousands of years.

ROSALIE (*shocked*): Oh—Margaret!

STEPHEN (*dryly*): Well, it'll seem like thousands of years—so we'll leave it at that. Come along. Have you got everything, Mr. Heimer?

HEIMER: Yes, *sir*. Every little thing.

They all begin moving down.

ROSALIE: What about this T. V.-com thing?

HEIMER: We're leaving the T. V.-com for you to play with.

STEPHEN (*as he goes*): Well, that's an idea. I might call up your friend Copplestone from time to time—and give him our local news: . . . Hay looking good . . . corn harvest promising . . . one or two nice girls getting married . . . nobody down with ulcers or delirium tremens . . .

He goes off chuckling, the last of the group. CHRIS and IRINA come slowly out of the house. IRINA is now wearing her uniform again, as in Act I. They stand for a moment, looking towards the dazzling light. Then they turn to each other.

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VOICE (*off*): Ready when you are. All set. Let's go.

IRINA (*quietly*): It is only the driver of the car.

CHRIS (*quietly*): No, it isn't. It's hell-on-earth, and in a moment it will swallow you, my darling, my love, and then it will have swallowed the best of me, too. Lost. Gone.

IRINA (*very quietly and carefully*): Everything that has happened between us—the smallest thing—every look you have given me—every word you have spoken, my darling—the bird singing in the moonlight—the sun among the leaves—everything—I have safely here in my heart. (*With a heartbroken little laugh.*) They are my rations. I must live on them a long time.

CHRIS (*urgently*): No, we shall meet again soon—somehow—

IRINA: Please, my darling, we have said all these things. It is too late to begin again now. I love you.

VOICE (*off*): Madame Shestova, let's get going. We're behind time.

IRINA (*through her tears*): It is you and I who have been behind time. And I shall always be there with you—for ever and ever—good-bye!

He tries to detain her, but she breaks away from him, running towards the light.

CHRIS (*a cry of despairing appeal*): Irina! Irina!

IRINA (*then off, fainter*): Good-bye!

CHRISTOPHER, *about to follow her, suddenly checks himself, and stands staring, lost. FRED appears from the house and comes forward. We hear the whirring sound again, and the searchlight begins to move slowly, as if the car were turning. A confused and rather distant sound of "Good-byes" off, mixed with the whirring noise, which increases and then diminishes as the light vanishes.*

FRED (*with great sympathy*): Christopher—lad—

CHRIS (*coming slowly out of his mood*): Yes, Fred?

FRED: Wouldn't you like a drink—or a bite to eat?

CHRIS: No, thanks, Fred. Not now. Later perhaps.

FRED: It's quite late now.

CHRIS: I'd like to be alone, Fred. If the others are coming in at once, then I'll clear out. If they're not, then I'll go in.

FRED: You ought to play something.

CHRIS (*slowly, rather dazed*): Yes, Fred, perhaps I ought to play something.

He goes in slowly. FRED stays still, then STEPHEN, MARGARET and ROSALIE enter slowly from side.

STEPHEN: Where's Christopher?

FRED: He's just gone in. He wants to be by himself—poor lad!

STEPHEN: I'll wait a minute, though I ought to have been in 'bed hours ago.

He sits, and ROSALIE and MARGARET, group themselves near him, with FRED standing at the back, making a definite pictorial group. There must be a feeling of wide night, tranquillity and tenderness in the scene now, with the voices floating out easily. The music of CHRISTOPHER'S violin, played very softly, should start after the first speech or so, and then should be blended with the speeches.

FRED (*after a pause*): I never said good-bye properly to them three—and I got to like 'em in the end—and now I don't suppose I'll ever see 'em again.

MARGARET (*slowly, dreamily*): I think you will see two of them again. They will come back just as friends, drawn by some sense of loss . . .

ROSALIE (*sadly*): But not Irina, you said. . . . I saw her face in the car and already it was frozen white, lost in a long winter . . .

FRED: What is it politicians have got that's more important than a young fellow and his girl loving each other like that?

STEPHEN (*grimly*): Nothing . . . nothing. And I wish the wreck of war had been wider still, so that every seat of power had been torn down. . . . There is an old tried pattern, a faded map, offering some chance of happiness, and still they pay men to rule thick lines across it . . .

ROSALIE: . . . After that horrible dazzling light everything seemed dark at first, but now I can see again. . . . The night has closed behind them without a scar, and every tree is like a candle burning in a quiet room . . .

STEPHEN: I see the hawthorn that the Roman stared at. . . . and soon I shall have gone with the Roman . . . leaving the green old tavern of the world.

MARGARET: We are nourished by this planet's clay and the flame that comes from behind the stars.

STEPHEN: And I have lived long enough to understand at last that what is neither clay nor flame, neither Earth nor Spirit, can only leave us famished and frustrated. . . . Send down your roots—and lift your faces to the sun and stars . . .

MARGARET *now moves forward a pace or two, staring intently out, as if at the audience. The light is now fading.*

What is it, Margaret? What do you see?

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MARGARET (*clearly, slowly, with voice fading as light fades*):

A thousand eyes narrowing to watch us here,
Eyes that may never reach this time we show,
But see us as so many shadows on the wall . . .

The last glimmer of light hesitates a moment, as the curtain very slowly creeps down.

END OF PLAY

